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Let us deliberate on the times when India was fighting for independence. How, led by some remarkable people, we chose the path of non-violence, when some other parts of the world were busy developing bombs! The British took up harsh measures to put the movement down including building large prisons like the Cellular Jail at Andamans where prisoners were inhumanely treated. There was also another facet to the Indian freedom struggle – the armed struggle by the Indian National Army or the INA.

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Editor
Usha Raman

Editorial Team
Shalini B
Nimesh Ved
Sushma Rana

Layout & Graphics
Rajendra Kumar S

Social Media
Shruti Singhal

Circulation
D Rohin Kumar

RNI Publications Consultant
K Raghurama Raju

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correspondence to

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Mobile: 8977942097
editorial@teacherplus.org
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Cover: Teacher bias in the spotlight

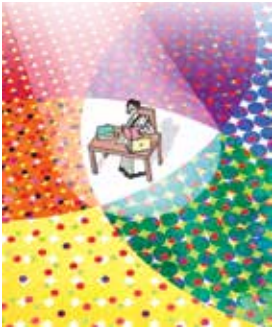
Jisha Unnikrishnan is an illustrator,
print designer and researcher based
in Ahmedabad. More of her work
can be seen on her website
www.jishaunnikrishnan.com.
She can be reached at
<jisha.mail@gmail.com>.



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A bit of spring cleaning for the mind?



There's nothing like traveling to an unfamiliar place to force you to confront your own assumptions and biases – of various kinds. About people and their practices, systems, foods... you name it, and we are likely to have an opinion, good or bad, that informs our expectations and even interactions. So, when we enter an unfamiliar context, and encounter situations – people and things – that we have only heard of second hand, we often find that there's a gap between what we thought we would see/experience and what actually faces us. This may lead to discomfort and denial, or to pleasant surprise and acceptance, depending on the nature of our biases. Foods that looked delicious in a glossy magazine may end up disappointing the taste buds; people who seemed cold and distant might turn out to be very helpful and warm. But of course, the extent to which we allow experience to actually change how we think, depends on how open we are to reflecting on and actually acknowledging our (often wrong) assumptions.

This seems like the premise of an annual drama in my own classroom. When a new cohort of students enters, it's much like walking into a new situation for the *n*th time. We enter with a whole bunch of expectations and ideas about how certain students will perform, based on their roll numbers, names, the way they look or hold their books or fidget in their seats. We make judgments about naughtiness and niceness, intelligence or lack thereof, ability and difference. As we gain experience, we may learn to set these biases aside and enter these new relationships with an open mind. But there are always those stubborn little ideas that stick and make you see in a certain way, closing off alternative views, and limiting one's chances to be surprised in good ways or even to be prepared for unpleasantness.

The articles in *Teacher Plus* more often than not spring from the belief that we can always learn new things and adopt new ways of seeing. But this also implies that we are prepared to accept that the ways in which we see and do might be imperfect, or even wrong, that we too may have many of those stubborn little ideas that frame our thinking without our being aware of it. With a bit of reflection and mental excavation, we can trace the sources of our biases and try to link them to our interactions with the world.

That's what we invite you to do – open yourself up to new experiences, allow the world to shock you a little, shake up the structures in your head now and then, and challenge your biases. And let us know what it does for you!

Usha Rana

The ABCs of early learning

Surabhi Agarwal

Hello preschool teachers! Your children are quite young. Closer to being babies as compared to other school children. The gap between expectations and reality during these early learning years is wide. To take them on a learning journey is no easy task. Also, many recommended pedagogical practices that we may appreciate in older children may not work here.

Given below are practices that help in day-to-day actions of a preschool classroom. These strategies especially cater to this age group. Nevertheless, many of them can be applied to higher age groups as well. Each of these is low cost, light on resources, independent of the curriculum and attempts to address unique challenges the age group presents.

Let's explore the ABCs of early learning.

Art based classrooms – Children have a natural affinity towards art. They gravitate towards opportunities to draw, colour, paint, and create. Colours and curiosity go hand-in-hand. Mentor them as they experiment with colouring and craft supplies. Plan and introduce music and dance in your morning routine. Such interventions can also motivate the children to engage with their surroundings.

Behavioural management – Rules are your best friends in managing classrooms. Design two to three classroom rules. Follow the three Cs. Clear, consistent, and communicative.

Be *clear* and specific about the behavioural expectation, apply it *consistently*, and *communicate* it in such a manner that children understand.

Do away with negative or aggressive language. Focus on what needs to be done. Rules can be framed to reinforce good behaviour.

Turn this...	... into this.
Don't look over there!	Eyes on the teacher.
No hitting or pushing.	Hands to ourselves.
Please be silent!	Let's use a soft voice.

Collaboration – To be able to work with their peers, children need to be clear on what is expected of them. For example, an instruction like, "Take turns to colour," is insufficient. Elaborate. Detail the precise steps to *ask* for turn, *give* turn, and *wait* for turn.

Stagger your approach while introducing collaborative activities. First, introduce pair work. Observe. If conflicts arise, resolve them through conversations. Once the students show willingness to share and work together, move to groups of three. Avoid making large groups of children.

Differentiation – Children learn at their own pace. There will always be few who have either not met the learning objectives or have exceeded them. In both cases, the children tend to zone out of the learning process.

This is where differentiation steps in. In simple terms, it means having a backup plan for the outliers. You may differentiate your *content* (worksheets, books, assessments) or *pedagogy* (peer learning, one-on-one time), or both. The idea is to make learning relevant for learners. Try to meet each child at his or her learning level. Ensure that everyone feels included and involved.

Energizers and attention grabbers – Navigating through different energy levels in a preschool can be daunting.

Let's visualize. It is the last hour of the day and everyone's feeling tired. How can you charge up the space? Energizers are rhymes, songs or games with simple actions that can be wrapped up in a few minutes. Not only are they super fun but they also raise the energy levels of a dull or lazy class.

What about the other way round? Are they refusing to settle down? Use *attention grabbers*. For example, "1, 2, 3... eyes on me!" Attention grabbers must be introduced when the class is calm. This way, next time chaos breaks out, the same attention grabber will get it to order.



F **inessing the fine motor** – Fine motor skills are the foundation for further writing and learning. To finesse these skills, each child should get sufficient objects to fiddle with. A lot of common, everyday objects can be used for this. Give beans (*chana or rajma*) for *picking* and counting. *Stack* using some plastic cups or jars. Use stickers and scotch tape for *pincer grasp*. Distribute thread rolls or straws to practise *beading*. Use a punching machine to prepare objects for *lacing*.

Playing with these objects not only develops small muscles and hand-eye coordination but also increases attention span and patience.



G **iving effective feedback** – Little kids benefit a lot from *positive feedback*. Observe closely and recognize their efforts. Praise them. Tell them why you are appreciating them. Praising is fundamental to behavioural learning theory and works much better than incentives.

Corrective feedback is the tricky one! If it is loud, sarcastic, or rhetorical, it can trigger a stress response. Instead, simply state your expectations in a neutral tone. Let your feedback be *specific, on time*, and something *that offers choice*.

Type	Non-example	Example
Specific	<i>You can do better! Wrap it up quickly!</i>	<i>I saw you colouring inside the lines today. Next time, we will also keep our crayons back in the kit.</i>
On time	<i>I saw you pushed him yesterday!</i>	<i>I see you pushing. Pushing can hurt. Let's keep our hands to ourselves.</i>
Offers choice	<i>Why did you spill? (rhetorical)</i>	<i>Did you spill it by mistake? Would you like to wipe it off?</i>



H **andling conflicts** – For many children, school is the first time they interact with others of their own age. It takes time to understand boundaries, and therefore, they often get into conflicts. They may throw temper tantrums, cry inconsolably, go into a shell, or even hit and hurt. In such situations, act quick and act calm.

First, stop any hurtful behaviour, action, or language. Next, maintain your composure. Then, soothe the kids involved in the tussle. Pause and acknowledge

their feelings. Hold hands, hug, sit quietly, and offer to listen. Once they're calm, they'll be able to listen to you. Suggest ways to resolve. And, if they do so in due time, praise and encourage the children.



I **terations** – You'll often find children stuck on a story, song, rhyme, or game. This is because repetition helps them make better connections. Repetition also allows them to acquire language and concepts.

Revise, recap, and repeat the learning objectives. It increases their confidence with the content. Bring variation in the worksheets, activities, projects, and pedagogy to keep the lessons interesting. Teaching lesser concepts with more repetitions is better than the other way round.



J **ournaling** – Journaling is a fun activity that will get your students excited about writing. Sit in a circle, distribute journals, provide stationery, give a few prompts, and let them express themselves. Encourage them to exhibit their skills, ideas, and feelings. Guide them on ways to personalize their journals.

Let them handle their journals, curate their own work, and share it with their friends. Make it a regular activity.



K **eeping up with technology** – You are nurturing a generation that has grown up with technology. Befriend technology. Use it to facilitate your teaching-learning process. Technology is an excellent tool to incorporate collaboration, language acquisition, and cultural development in your class. Be their coach and facilitate their interactions with technology.


Use technology to read, research, learn, unlearn, and relearn so that you keep pace with the evolving world of education.




L **everaging parent interactions** – PTMs have the potential to be more than just an administrative formality. They can be leveraged to enable transformative changes in children.


Always enter a PTM with adequate preparation. Summarize key points that you wish to discuss. Use the time thoughtfully. Clearly communicate your expectations. Such awareness will be useful in avoiding contradictory parental behaviour at home.


Share the performance indicators constructively and encourage their inclusion in the child's overall progress.


 **Making use of assessments** – It is reductive to use assessments only for filling in reports cards. Modern assessments go beyond examinations, corrections, and data! They present a holistic growth record around all developmental areas (languages, numeracy, cognitive, socio-emotional, physical/motor). They form the base for constructive collaboration with parents. Assessments also help in understanding the gaps in curriculum and instruction.


 **Numbers around you** – When it comes to foundational numeracy, the world around is full of opportunities.


Teach *sequencing* to the kids by listing the tasks of the day. *Allot numbers to their books and toys*. Use floor games to develop *spatial awareness*. Let them *compare* the number of rocks and flowers in a garden. Teach *measurement* using common stationery items. *Count and number* the furniture around you. Kids can learn plenty of pre-maths skills provided they pay attention to the world around them. Your task is to teach them how to observe.


 **Observing routines** – Establishing routines make nervous pre-schoolers feel safe. It builds familiarity and anchors their school day to a time or feeling. Repetition with routines gives them a sense of emotional safety. Create small routines around everyday activities like circle time, snack time, washroom breaks, and closures. Apply them consistently. However, be flexible enough to accommodate their health and safety needs!

 **Play based learning** – Any learning moulded as a game will engage the children. Educators recommend it. NEP too endorses it. Learning through play breaks the monotony and allows students to discover and experiment. Use games and puzzles like jigsaw, jumbled letters, abacus, and shape sorters to meet learning objectives. Mould the academic skills into playful experiences that kids can enjoy and learn from.

 **Quiet time** – Constant stimulation of senses can be overwhelming. Plan for ten to fifteen minutes of quiet time in your daily routine. There are no curricular goals during quiet time. You *may choose* to play calm music and allow activities that kids can do quietly like reading, colouring, and puzzles. Tell them to work individually and silently. Children learn to use this time to relax, recharge their energy, deal with conflicts, handle anxiety, and calm their nerves. Healthy boredom unlocks a child's creative potential. The key is to support them with ideas and activities.

 **Reading corners** – With technology entering so many aspects of our lives, getting children to choose to read is going to get increasingly tough. Set up a class library or a reading corner that has a collection of books in all relevant languages. Curate book lists to include contextual, age appropriate, richly illustrated, and non-boring books so that kids embrace the habit of reading. Look for titles for emergent and beginning readers. Include some bilingual books if you can. And read when they are around!

 **Story reading** – Very few things hook children better than an effective read aloud. It develops familiarity and love for the language. Thoughtfully select the books for holding read aloud sessions. Experiment with stories. Use stories. Use them to teach skills. Let them *observe and question* through picture talk. Ask them to *predict* plot. See them *empathize* with feelings and struggles of a character. Read stories with conflicts and resolutions to teach about *good choices*. Let the world of stories spark their imagination.

 **Teacher modelling** – Children observe and mirror your skills, techniques, and behaviour. Ensure that they see you demonstrating precisely what they're supposed to do.

Contrary to belief, teacher modelling can be interactive and engaging. Narrate your thought process while modelling a task. Use simple sentences (*I am colouring the Sun. I'd like to use yellow and orange. I am colouring inside the lines.*) Ask pointed questions while you are modelling (*What colour should I use for the Sun? Can I use black instead? No? Why?*) Use sentence frames (or question frames) that kids can imitate while doing the task on their own.



Understanding daily transitions –

Transitions refers to the time between two distinct activities. Transitions may get highly chaotic as kindergartners can be unwary or impulsive. When transitions involve movement, kids may become disruptive as well.

Plan ahead. Mark all the times of the day when you'll need to switch between activities.

Next, tell your students what they need to do during the transition. Use short sentences to breakdown their task (*It's play time. We will go to the garden. We will walk in a line. We will keep our hands to ourselves.*)

Give repetitive instructions to signal the start and end of an activity. For example, *Let's begin!* or *It's wrap up time!* You may build a small routine for transitions along with a transition song.



Verbalizing feelings – Excitement, jealousy, anger, adavance, inhibition, and pride are difficult emotions for grownups, let alone children. They feel these but cannot explain.

Give them words. Words they can use to name their feelings. Use a *feelings chart* that they can refer to for recognizing their emotions. Use *puppets and toys* to explain simple emotions like happy, sad, angry, and scared. Above all, *demonstrate* healthy expression of feelings.



Working with visuals – Strategically design and set up your classroom.

Smartly use colours to create an ambience for your class (labelling, grouping, sorting objects). Use the displays to reinforce your literacy and numeracy goals.

Make *word walls* and update frequently. These help children absorb new vocabulary, recognize sight words and differentiate languages. *Work your current theme* in displays. For example, if your theme is around animals, you may show count using animal pictures.



is for explore – Learning can happen outside the classroom as well. Step out. Outside is fresh and fun. Outside is also better. Better to observe, discover, and question.

Ask the children to *count* the flowers and grow a plant. Guide them to *make a story* about an ant that they find in the garden. Tell them to *recognize patterns* in leaves and replicate it. Nature provides many such learning opportunities. Use outside time to implement discovery-based and inquiry-based pedagogy.



oga – Yoga is the answer to a lot of early learning struggles. Allow the children the immense benefits of a regular exercise routine. Keep it short and appropriate for their age.

Yoga helps the children develop balance and flexibility. It also sows the seeds of sound mental health. It builds focus, attention, and reduces anxiety.



oning – Children can get messy and unpredictable. Create zones or learning centres within your classroom for different activities. Use colours to demarcate zones and display the rules.

Zoning is effective when activities require specific *stationery* (colouring, painting, moulding) or *grouping* (projects, jigsaw) or *ambience* (reading corner, free play). Zoning comes handy while *practising differentiation* as it allows kids to work with the material they prefer.

The author is a former Teach for India fellow who works as an independent educational consultant and can be reached at <surabhi.edtech@gmail.com>.

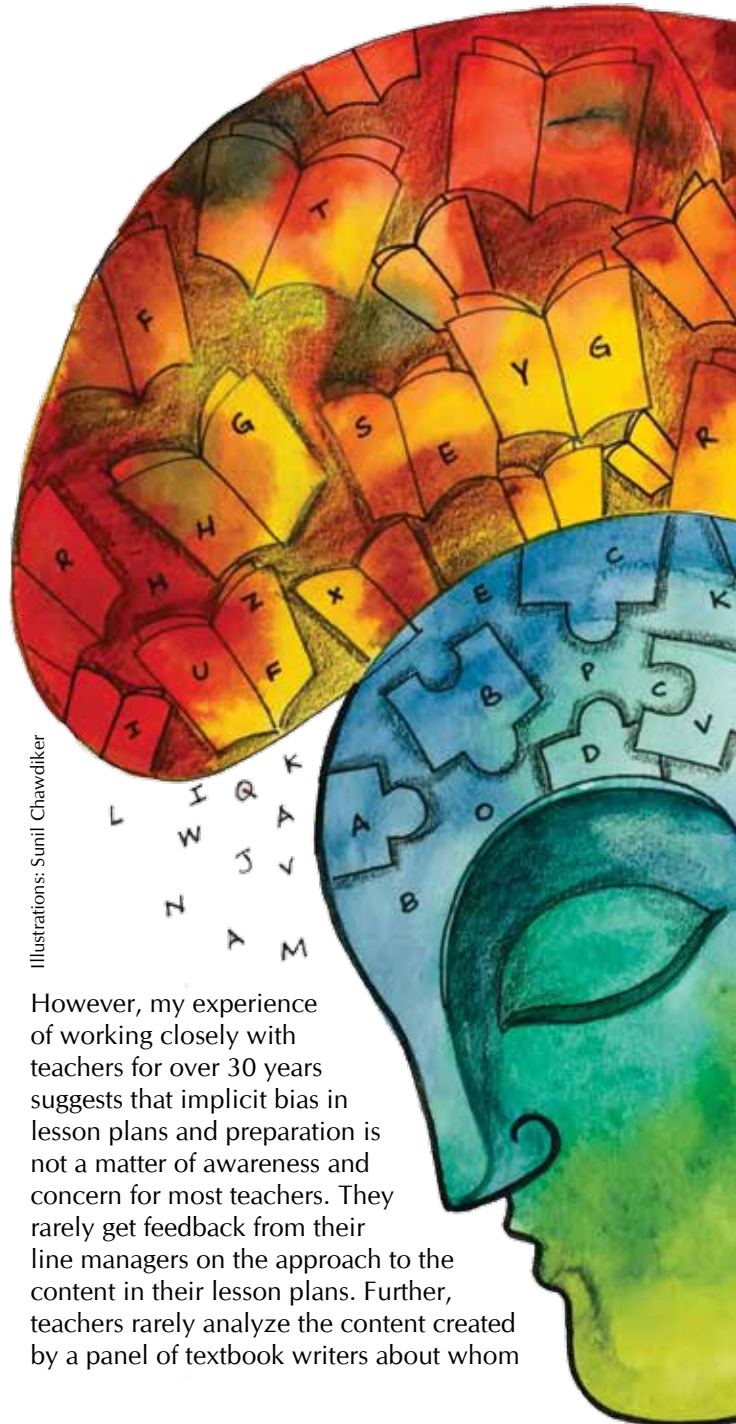
The myth of the unbiased teacher

Kavita Anand

The year is 1995. I walk into a classroom for an observation of a history lesson. The students are listening with great interest to a story the teacher is narrating about Aurangzeb's reign and the manner in which he inadvertently created the conditions for the fall of the dynasty. I am startled by the teacher's almost defiant extolling of Aurangzeb's greatness as a deeply religious man who did what he thought was the right thing. The teacher had undertaken research on Aurangzeb while pursuing her academics and seemed to empathize with him. She told the students what she was saying was in contradiction to the textbook and that she was convinced that the textbook writers were biased against him.

I wondered then whether the teacher realized that she was responding to a perceived bias in the textbook by communicating her own bias, and where this would leave the students. Neither the teacher nor the textbook talked of the documents they had based their opinions on. Rather than enable the students to exercise their judgements both the teacher and textbook asked the students to believe in what they read and heard.

As humans who use language to think and communicate, it is startling how unaware we are of the manner in which our own biases operate, though we may be far more conscious of those expressed by others with whom we interact. There are, of course, times when it becomes more obvious, for instance, in the varied response to the government's implementation of the COVID vaccine. Or when elections are announced and the differences in opinions become obvious. In those times we may be deeply conscious of our own choice and that of others. We may even accept that our conviction that we have the 'right' reasons underlying the choice is our bias.

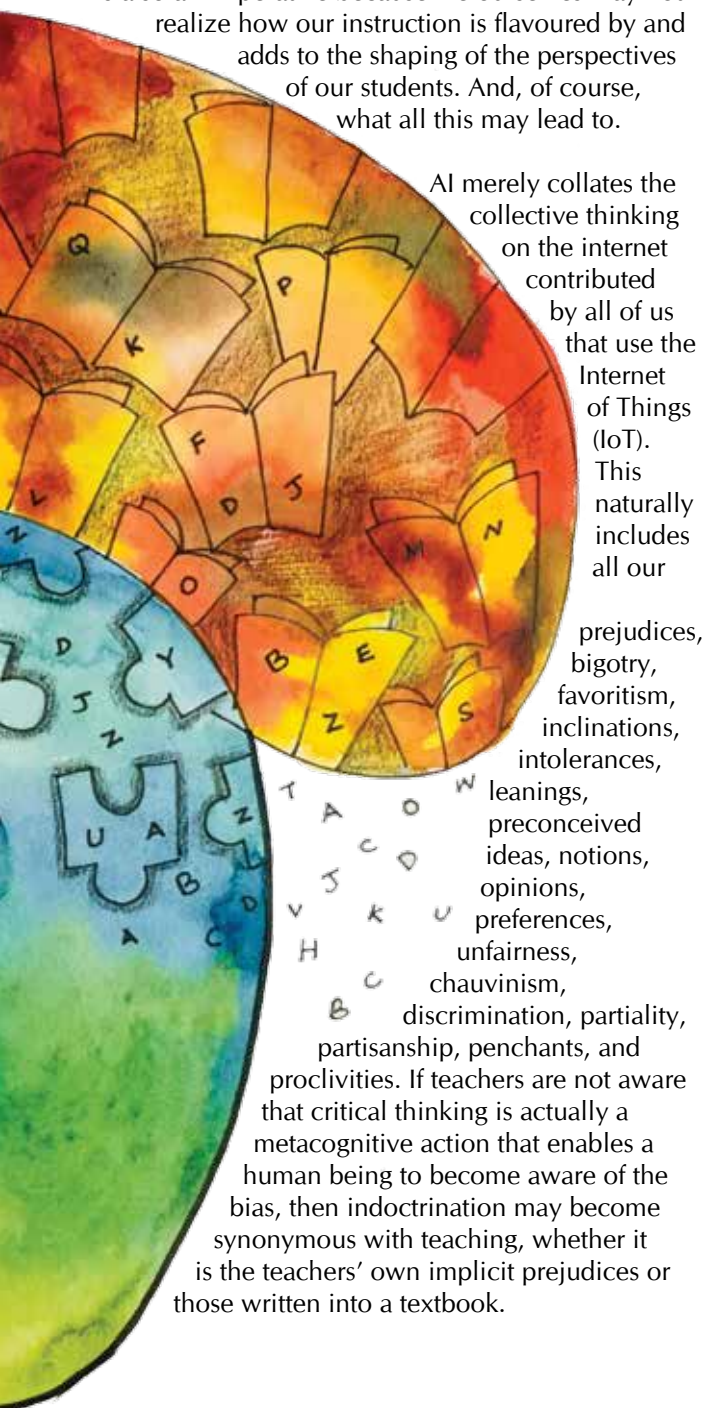


Illustrations: Sunil Chawdhiker

However, my experience of working closely with teachers for over 30 years suggests that implicit bias in lesson plans and preparation is not a matter of awareness and concern for most teachers. They rarely get feedback from their line managers on the approach to the content in their lesson plans. Further, teachers rarely analyze the content created by a panel of textbook writers about whom

they do not know much other than their professional qualifications. They rarely examine textbooks for biases. A textbook critique is typically limited to content related errors.

Now that machine learning and AI are becoming a very large part of our lives, it may be an imperative to understand our biases – not just because student work is going to depend on the implicit and explicit biases on the internet that will form their answers. It is also an imperative because we ourselves may not realize how our instruction is flavoured by and adds to the shaping of the perspectives of our students. And, of course, what all this may lead to.



Becoming discerning

To be able to discern these biases in all that we read, we need the lens of critical thinking. This lens develops when we learn to read “against the grain” and locate the content as an opinion or thought arising in a context. Teachers who promote critical thinking present content as the beginning of an enquiry and encourage students to investigate and present their own perceptions and beliefs as well. The answers of the students are expected to have references, attributions, and a well-formed individual perspective. Students with practice in critical thinking are able to identify the beliefs that lead to their actions and relationships. They can also appreciate why others would have different beliefs.

Teachers’ approaches towards developing critical thinking shape their delivery to and expectations of students. Those who believe students must develop a ‘voice’, expect students to think for themselves and develop their own arguments. On the other hand, teachers who simply expect students to present the line of thinking that is already stated in the textbook, discourage what they call ‘extra reading’. These approaches to learning are implicit biases that most teachers may not be aware of within themselves. Research by Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson¹ in which a random cohort of students was introduced to the teacher as a class of high performers and another as a class of low performers brought this to the fore. The manner in which the teacher dealt with the students made the labels into a self-fulfilling prophecy that they called the ‘Pygmalion effect’. While the study was later criticized for ethical reasons, it did call to our attention possible reasons why teachers are quick to identify children on the “normal curve”. They identify top performers, mid performers and low performers as a convenient categorization.

Such categories are not useful for teachers who like to understand the motivation of each student, encourage every student to express themselves in multiple ways and view each student’s learning journey as unique. They are interested in when a student is in a ‘learning sprint’ and when there seems to be a ‘learning crawl’, to understand what enables each student to experience the “aha” moment. They create a learning environment in which students ask questions and bring information to the class.

The Right to Education Act, 2009 (RTE) demanded that all private schools must give free-seats to students from low socio-economic classes. Very little

research has been done to check if and how the students from low socio-economic classes are able to integrate with the other students in their class. And, more importantly, what steps their teachers are taking to help make this possible and how much are the biases of teachers affecting the students. A study by Gopalkrishnan Iyer² in 2018 on the effectiveness of the RTE in unrecognized schools in Delhi found that teacher training, SMC formation and training, and hands-on experiential pedagogy had a positive impact on student learning outcomes. However, another by Meera Nath Sarin³ identified poor learning outcomes as a result of teacher bias toward the no detention policy. No study was found in the public domain on teachers' reflection on their relationship to fee paying or higher performing students or students whose parents demand accountability.

The National Education Policy, 2020 (NEP) in clause 6.19 states: *'All participants in the school education system, including teachers, principals, administrators, counsellors, and students, will be sensitized to the requirements of all students, the notions of inclusion and equity, and the respect, dignity, and privacy of all persons. Such an educational culture will provide the best pathway to help students become empowered individuals who, in turn, will enable society to transform into one that is responsible towards its most vulnerable citizens.'* In clause 6.20 it goes on to state: *'Any biases and stereotypes in school curriculum will be removed, and more material will be included that is relevant and relatable to all communities'.*

Biases come in all shapes and sizes

In addition to socio-economic class, NEP refers to biases towards gender, race, language, special needs, culture, deportment, responsiveness of the student and performance in the assessments. Nita Luthria Row, educator and former school leader has noticed teachers exhibit a gender bias such as 'boys are better at mathematics and science', 'girls are better at language and arts' and a bias towards 'smart' children vs 'slow' learners including equating children's appearance with intelligence. She says, "Children get labeled and then begin to believe in those labels." This can often last for life. We all know adults who feel they are not good at drawing or mathematics because their teacher said it to them as children.

According to Viveki Pasta, teacher for 23 years, "Other students may sense the teachers' bias and display the same behaviour towards the child." The power dynamic of the classroom is often such that

attention from a teacher immediately makes a child visible. The reverse is also true. Soniya Mawani who is developing a programme for embedding standards in her school network feels that "Children who can sense this bias will act out either to seek attention or simply give up. Either way they will be impacted negatively." Seeking attention is a sign of wanting to be visible to the teacher and peers.

Looking at the interaction from the teachers' perspective, Dr. Bhawna Shivan, a teaching leader, has noticed that, "If teachers feel a concept is complex and difficult to explain they portray the concept to students as one that is difficult to understand!" When their students demonstrate their understanding easily, the teacher is forced to examine her perception of the concept. This bias may seem unusual until we view it in the light of teachers authoritatively asking students to refrain from doing the exercises at the end of the chapter as it has not yet been taught. The assertion by a teacher to a student that, "You don't need to know this – it is not in your syllabus," could mask the fear that a student's eagerness and curiosity to learn may take the teacher into unknown (to the teacher) territory. This would be a loss of face if the internal belief is that the teacher must at all times be the font of all knowledge.

Implicit biases can manifest in various ways in the classroom. They can influence a teacher's instructional strategies, feedback, disciplinary practices, and even the allocation of resources. For instance, a teacher may unintentionally call on certain students more frequently, or provide more detailed feedback to some students while overlooking others.

Much of teachers' practice depends on the pedagogical culture of the school that is set by its leadership and governance. In Rhiannon Moore's research⁴ on teacher effectiveness, key findings indicated that "teachers in state government schools prioritize 'productivity' aspects of teaching, such as rote learning and completing tests, while teachers in tribal social welfare schools place more value on student-centered learning and equity in the classroom. However, linking teacher responses to student data suggests that what teachers report about 'best practices' does not necessarily align with their actual classroom practices."

Teachers' use of what they learn in their preservice and in-service training depends almost entirely on their line managers – the departmental leaders and

the school leadership. If the leadership team does not go into classrooms to check teacher bias, it is unlikely that teachers will be aware of whether their relationship with students is unequal and supportive of a small minority in their classes.

To address these biases, a combination of self-reflection by the teacher, supportive monitoring by the line manager, and continuous professional development by the school or education department. It also requires nurturing collective teacher efficacy in staff rooms, that enables teachers to share their practice to the students they teach. Researcher John Hattie⁵ has found that collective teacher efficacy has the highest effect size on student achievement.

Amisha Modi and Nita Inamati, teachers with more than 10 years of experience have experienced the negative impact of staffroom conversations on students. Siblings have had the experience vicariously – “Oh you are just not like your sister at all!” and students who are not academically inclined have been told that they cannot expect “special treatment”. These biases seem completely uncalled for, as do situations in which teachers favour one gender over the other, often being punitive with one student while the other gets away with the same misdemeanour. Teachers have been known to invest more energy and interest with the child who attains

higher performance scores. These students get a lot more useful feedback as their performance reflects well on the image of the successful teacher. Some students who do well academically are axiomatically asked to take on leadership roles even if they have shown no evidence of social influence.

Can teachers rid themselves of negative bias?

Teachers may well be mortified if they realized and recognized how inadvertently they provide more attention, opportunities, or resources to certain students while neglecting or undervaluing others. How can we all, teachers and other adults, recognize the impact we unknowingly have that decreases or increases the engagement, motivation, and wellbeing of our students?

To examine one's own beliefs, attitudes, and stereotypes requires honest introspection and the acknowledgement that it takes enormous amounts of practice to be truly aware of how the mind categorises and puts people into boxes at lightning speed. According to J. Krishnamurti, “There can be freedom only when the mind is immediately aware of its conditioning, which brings about the cessation of that conditioning.”⁶

It takes courageous introspection and a real interest in feedback from colleagues, administrators, and



most importantly, from our students themselves, to identify one's blind spots. "Students are best to know their teachers' biases," says Geeta Varshneya, a school leader in Delhi with 41 years of experience. Geeta's hint suggests that if a teacher believes they are unbiased, they may want to check this myth with the students.

The language a teacher uses has to have strong filters to ensure stereotypes are minimized and all students feel safe, respected and their contribution is valued. In the words of Nitin Padte, teacher and school leader for 30 years, "An approach of tentativeness will support an atmosphere of inquiry." Teachers who present theoretical knowledge by situating it in a context are more able to invite students to analyse it. Not being too quick with 'the right answer' could well be the first step towards enabling students to suggest other ways of approaching the question.

The careful examination of the textbook and other content used should be undertaken to highlight and enable students to notice mono perspectives and misrepresentations. To support students to challenge all stereotypes in the content. Encourage them to identify what they notice about the manner in which the content is presented.

Collective teacher efficacy suggests that all teachers should work together to identify and use teaching strategies that provide equitable opportunities for all students. Equitable is different from equal. Equitable enables every student to stretch their thinking further, which may mean it is different for different students, and no student is left out. Increasing the portfolio of instructional delivery, requiring student engagement in order to create a classroom environment that values diverse voices and abilities are additional strategies that teachers deploy.

It is extremely important for a teacher to understand the home environment of every child and to build a trusting relationship with the parents of their students. Students must have the trust and respect of their teachers and teachers must have the trust and respect of their students and parents. Knowing what makes students excited helps teachers to know their aspirations or "foreground" – where they want to go, what they wish to be good at. This is expressed as a positive bias by teachers like Amisha, Bhawna and Viveki who are sure that they can reach the most disengaged students. Seema Amalnerkar who has facilitated teacher professional development for years, suggests the positive thing about a bias is that,

"it encourages debates." Had the history teacher held a debate instead of merely expressing her beliefs, she would be able to ask students to present both possibilities with supporting evidence.

We may ask ourselves as educators, whether our bias towards students' memorizing teachers' notes or textbook content and presenting it as their own answer in an assessment, is in effect enabling students in every subject and every assessment to practice plagiarism! Let us instead be aware and deliberate in our biases as did Gijubhai Badheka⁷, that all students need to and can have a voice and find learning enjoyable, meaningful and empowering.

Teachers who claim to be unbiased are simply unaware of their biases. Teachers' biases are possibly evident to their students and colleagues more easily than they are to themselves. It is contingent on every educator to be aware of how their biases could be impacting on their students and how pro-student biases could support the grit and determination of the teacher to engage their students in learning, whatever be the circumstances.

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The author is the founder director of Adhyayan Quality Education Foundation and can be reached at <kavita.anand@adhyayanfoundation.org>.

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Just Imagine

Chintan Girish Modi

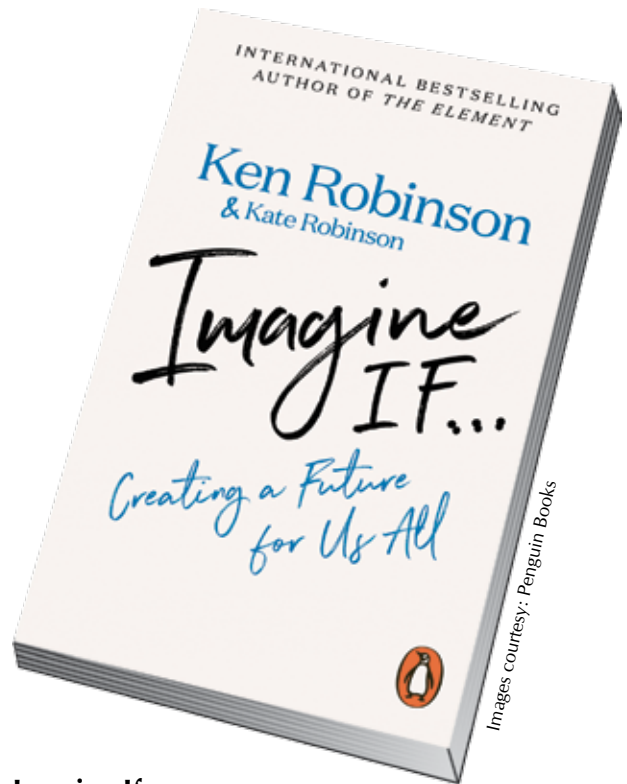
"Opportunities for change exist within every school. Schools often do things simply because they've always done them that way, but many of these habits are not mandated. The best place to start thinking about how to change education is exactly where you are in it."

How do these words from Sir Ken Robinson and Kate Robinson's book *Imagine If...* speak to you? Do they make you feel responsible, scared, empowered or implicated? How you receive them might have to do with your experience of being a teacher, shaped by the systems that you work within but also your beliefs about education, schools, and what learning entails.

Sir Ken Robinson was a professor of education at the University of Warwick in the United Kingdom until he passed away in 2020. His ideas about creativity, innovation and human potential have circulated widely thanks to his TED talk titled "Do Schools Kill Creativity?" and his report titled "All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education". This book is meant to be a concise introduction to his key ideas and propositions, developed over a lifetime.

His daughter, Kate Robinson, is a writer and speaker who runs the SKR Legacy Collective Fund and the non-profit called Imagine If... that gives this book its title. She describes her father's work as "a deep criticism of the many systems that we have come to take for granted" and also "a love letter to human potential". Drawing inspiration from his work, she is now involved in projects that are related to education, environment, and culture.

This book is divided into eight chapters: 1. The Human Advantage 2. The World We Have Created 3. You're More Than You Think 4. The Promise of Education 5. From the Factory to the Farm 6. Creating Miracles 7. One Shot 8. Be the Change. It can be read from start to finish in just a day. But, you could also read a chapter at a time, reflect and journal about it. If your school has a weekly or monthly reflection meeting that is meant for professional development, you might want to consider using a few excerpts from this book to focus on.



Images courtesy: Penguin Books

Imagine If...

Authors: Ken Robinson and Kate Robinson

Publisher: Penguin Books

Year of publication: 2022

Number of pages: 144

Price: UK £9.99

Imagine If... is worth reading because it does not shy away from calling out what ails the contemporary education system. At the same time, it does so with love and not bitterness. It does not paint an unredeemable picture. It gives a reality check, but it also provides hope. It reassures teachers that they matter, and so does their work; that they can change the system simply by changing "the experiences of education" for the students whom they work with.

This book is a plea for teachers to bolster children, not demoralize them. It asks teachers to honour “the marvellous diversity of young people’s talents and interests”, and not reduce education to “narrow forms of academic ability”. It offers a blueprint for course correction, and imagination is at the centre of it. In this book, imagination is defined as “the ability to bring to mind things that are not present to our senses”, and it is supported by creativity that is defined as “the process of putting your imagination to work”. In other words, imagination helps us think of alternative possibilities, and creativity gives us the tools to realize them.

Here are some ideas to take away from the book and apply to your context:

1. Look beyond standardized testing.

Amidst the pressures of assessment, it can be hard to remember that “all children are born with vast potential” and that the purpose of education is to help them “flourish in both worlds, outer and inner.” This book will remind you that the stress caused by standardized testing is pushing students to suicide, so that you do not lose sight of the big picture. The intent behind assessment is to get a picture of what students have learnt, where they are struggling, and the kind of support they need. Their interests and strengths need to be understood; else assessment will be an emotional ordeal and an administrative nightmare.

2. Engage with local communities.

Do you think of parent-teacher meetings as necessarily evils or do you look forward to them? *Imagine If...* points out that “parent and caregiver participation” is a vital resource that schools must tap into so that learning opportunities respond to who children are and where they live. The authors suggest that problems related to bullying and discipline that occur in the classroom or as part of other spaces on campus often begin in the world outside school. They recommend developing closer ties with families because learning does not take place in isolation for those who come to school. They are initiated into their culture at home.

3. Be thoughtful about the physical environment.

Light, temperature, air quality, furniture and so many other aspects of the physical environment affect the mood and motivation of children who go to school. Do you and your colleagues think about whether the children have enough space to move around, if the environment inspires confidence or dread, whether the chairs that they are sit in for hours on end are

comfortable enough, if the light in their classroom is adequate to help them be attentive? Is it possible to redesign some of the spaces, in consultation with children to break the monotony and also to get them to reflect on how spaces contribute to learning? Thankfully, the authors are aware that schools are constrained by the resources at hand.

4. Prepare students for the changing economic landscape.

While learning can be enjoyed for its own sake, a large number of parents send their children to school because they want a higher standard of living for the next generation. This book proposes that schools must “connect students with their unique talents and interests, dissolve the division between academic and vocational programmes, and foster practical partnerships between schools and the world of work”. The rationale is that education should empower students to be economically responsible and independent. When the job market is changing so rapidly due to advances in technology and other spheres of life the children need more than bookish learning. They need to experience working environments as part of their education and need to learn to adapt to new scenarios.

5. Make room for play.

Teachers often worry about how today’s children are losing out on their childhood but they also feel a bit helpless when it comes to addressing this. The authors of this book drive home the point that play should not be seen as a waste of time; it is part of how children learn. They advise schools to “stand aside and let it happen” because “children do not need lessons in how to play, nor do they need to overly surveilled or scheduled...they simply require the space and freedom to do what they naturally do best.” Getting out of the way is difficult for teachers, and this is partly understandable because bullying often happens during playtime.

As you mull over these ideas, it might be helpful to watch the questions and doubts that arise, and note down the exciting possibilities that bubble up in your mind so that you can share them with your colleagues, your students and their parents to imagine the kind of school that all of you would not only love to come to but also create together; slowly and lovingly.

The author is a bibliophile, journalist, and educator based in Mumbai. He can be reached at [<chintan.writing@gmail.com>](mailto:chintan.writing@gmail.com).

Students as Futurists

Imagination in the classroom

Ketaki Chowkhani and Kushal Sohal

Futures Literacy is a capability that builds on the innate human capacity to imagine. It is a skill that enables us to understand how we anticipate, helps us to identify the sources of our hopes and fears, and encourages us to reframe our assumptions. Through codesigned workshops, we can invite playful exploration of futures, those we deem probable, desirable, and alternative scenarios. Not only do such activities help us plan, prepare and adapt as changes occur, but they also support efforts to identify novelty, navigate complexity, feel empowered to transform the present, and to ultimately have fun with others. As opposed to rote-learning and textbook classroom activities, this interactive learn-by-doing approach sparks energy and ideas in learning spaces and can be used by academics as an ethnographic form of action-research around a chosen topic.

Ketaki Chowkhani, who teaches sociology at the Manipal Centre for Humanities, incorporated an assignment to imagine gender utopias within her undergraduate course on gender. The students were tasked to imagine a utopia vis-à-vis gender and sexuality, building upon the readings that discussed feminisms, gender inequalities and discrimination, dissonances within the family, sexual and gendered violence, and reproduction. The aim was to be able to imagine a better world, neither an immediate future which temporarily resolves the problems on hand, nor to suggest 'politically correct solutions' to contemporary issues. The students were asked to envisage a radical shift in the world vis-à-vis gender, to let their imagination run wild, and to be as creative as possible by incorporating different genres of writing: poetry, plays, cartoons, newsletters, and correspondences. The idea was to support the students to shift their thinking and instead engage with their imagination, to be creative and think beyond the immediate.

A similar exercise had been conducted with a different batch previously. Then, the students had not been able to let their imaginations run wild.

The present batch too was initially sceptical. They seemed to be unable to imagine a utopia, or weren't sure if it was grand or wild enough. However, after repeated discussions in the class addressing their doubts and queries including resistance to the very idea of utopia itself, they were able to deliver the essays.

On reflecting upon their resistance to this creative process, we realized that the education system in India seldom encourages its students to imagine or be creative and focuses on textbook based learning. When the students were presented the opportunity to be creative, it felt very alien to them. Yet, they bravely took up the challenge, and after



Illustration: Sagarika Wadiyar

a prolonged 'labour', came out with their utopias. Ten of the assignments were then presented as part of a Futures Literacy workshop facilitated by Kushal Sohal, enabling the students to share with each other their images of a utopian future and reflect on the assumptions they had challenged.

Insights

As we listened to the 10 students present their imaginings of abstract and alternative futures that play with conceptions of gender, sexuality and their intersectionalities, we found ourselves awe-struck by their creativity. Students reframed phenomena such as reproduction, sex, pleasure, categorization, space, body, consent, care, love, and astrology.

Dekyong played with the idea of reproductive animals whose sex is not fixed and thus society is organized around equality of each to choose whether or not they want to make and hold an offspring within their body. Oishee took us into the realms of a multiverse, where personalities and appearances were shaped by elements and zodiac signs. With no gender specificity and fluid sexual orientations, we learnt about a society organized around principles of compassion and passion to love without the need for relationships to be labelled. Consent and accountability were central to the way in which the society operated. Chetana moved us into a post-apocalyptic world, with alternative housing societies and community bubbles. While the bubbles could be infused and their ethical boundaries redrawn, the idea would be to promote personal space and transparency as a route towards peaceful coexistence. Amshula reinterpreted the Shakespearean drama Macbeth, imagining the witches' prophecies celebrating gender fluidity being in conflict with a clueless, prejudiced man trapped in a world he does not understand. He must learn to rid himself of 'toxicity' and reckon with his behaviour. Sagarika's tale celebrated the world of Lady Labia – a goddess of pleasure. Complete with chromosome transformations, centring female self-sufficiency as opposed to male control, it understood pleasure as not only sexual but a sensation found in diversity and the flowers of nature. Taking inspiration from TV and film, Agnes shared a story of a technological world where one would need a permit to have a baby and children would choose their own body parts, including genitalia. Vidisha's science fiction presented a scenario where bodies cease to exist, a virtual reality simulation where there are no hierarchies in character traits and identities, but only a desire to feel stimulated. Akanksha's narrative

story was shared in the form of a song. Beings would have no sexual reproductive organs, instead there would be phoenix-inspired regeneration. The soul and body meet without shame, intimacy is cherished and sex understood as not simply penetrative. There would be no pain of labour, only the pleasures of leisure. Siri spoke of a world that transcends time and materiality, where humans have become gods with immense dynamism and infinite choice, a world that celebrates the language of agency and fluidity. Centring love, Joseph spoke of a completely harmonious world of new beings, where the physical body is elevated to a higher state of consciousness and gender is a fluid river – forever shape-shifting in a physical and spiritual sense.

Reflections

Reflecting on their images of the future, we worked with students to identify the assumptions they had reframed. Students had demonstrated that playing with imagination revealed the manner in which systems enabled and disabled agency, the controlling nature of governance and power, the difference between reproductive and regenerative; fluidity vis-à-vis rigidity, the way we see the body as the subject of categorization; and the spiritual as beyond definition. They had shown us the capacity to imagine societies driven by curiosity, ease in plurality, a balance between self-sufficiency and interdependence. Central to students' imaginings was an interplay between thought and feeling, they had spoken of worlds without shame, and championed love, intimacy, and pleasure in all their liberated, joyful, passionate forms.

The exercise showed us that Futures Literacy activities such as designing utopias enhances creative-thinking and imagination in learning spaces, enabling curious students to engage more innovatively with their areas of study. We need more such spaces within the classroom where students can imagine, play, be creative; envisaging utopias might be just a start.

Ketaki Chowkhani, PhD, is Assistant Professor at Manipal Centre for Humanities, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, India. She can be reached at [<kchowkhani@gmail.com>](mailto:kchowkhani@gmail.com).

Kushal Sohal is a London-based Next Generation Foresight Practitioner with the School of International Futures and a Consultant with the Futures Literacy and Foresight team at UNESCO HQ. He can be reached at [<kushalsohal@gmail.com>](mailto:kushalsohal@gmail.com) and/or twitter at [@KushalSohal](https://twitter.com/KushalSohal).

How correct is our correction?

Jwairia Saleem

Checking students' work is an integral part of a teacher's duties. Stories, conversations, and media are replete with pictures of an overloaded and exhausted teacher wielding a red-ink pen, bending over a pile of notebooks in dim light and working into the wee hours of the morning. Such stereotyping has reduced an otherwise energizing and productive exercise to the drudgery of daily routine. An activity that does more damage than good.

So, why do we check students' work? And what do we look for?

A vast majority of answers to these questions hover around the idea of checking for completion of work, ensuring correctness of notes, and of-course picking errors in syntax or lexicon.

I am yet to come across a student who is happy to see his work streaked with red lines and circles or make attempts to figure out the error and rectify it. Unless, of course, it is to check if the teacher has made an error and by pointing it out, the student could add to his marks or redeem his self-esteem. The outcome of such a corrective exercise more often than not is unpleasantness, disappointment, shame, guilt, resentment, anger, jealousy – a mixed bag of emotions that no one would choose to carry.

This necessitates that we ask some very pertinent questions about the purpose of this age-old, time-consuming, and back-breaking practice of correcting student work. Do we intend to penalize students for not knowing? How does generating such emotions that harm the students' self-belief impact student's socio-emotional well-being and affect class dynamics? Do we believe that shaming the students will help them learn and improve?

We tend to think our core responsibility as teachers is to teach. However, this perception of our role is fundamentally skewed and has thrown us off

balance.

Our job as teachers is not to teach, but to help children learn (equally applicable to adults!). If we look at our work, including the task of notebook correction, through this new lens, we will want to do a lot of things very differently – so differently that it will transform the very ecosystem we work in today.

Marking errors in red or circling them tells students they are wrong, without telling them why or how they can rectify those errors. This type of correction does not help students learn, rather it leads them to think of the teacher as the 'fault finder' who punishes him with poor marks that diminish him among peers and family. So how can we make checking notebooks a fruitful exercise that supports student learning and builds trust and creates positive classroom dynamics?

Students have an innate capacity to learn. They also have the motivation to do so. They learn from teachers, from peers, from the environment, and by reflecting on their own work. When as teachers we acknowledge these attributes of the learner, we realize that we do not have to carry the herculean task of 'educating' them on our weak shoulders. The responsibility to learn lies with the students while our responsibility is to support them and enable them to take responsibility for their own learning. So, we don't tell the students what is wrong but help them to figure it out on their own. We do not 'correct' their mistakes, but we help the students to find ways to rectify them.

Let's approach checking of notebooks with this change of perspective by answering these questions: How can we help students identify the errors they make?



Photo: Nimesh Ved

How can we tell them how these can be rectified?

A good start that works for the teacher beginning to make this shift is to have a list of correction symbols, co-developed with the students and posted preferably in the class where they are visible and offer a ready reference for everyone. While at it, we also provide them opportunities to deeply *explore* the subject, *analyze* content, *predict* the kind of mistakes they might make, *select* or *create* appropriate symbols, *collaborate* with one another to *develop* the list, *respecting* and *appreciating* the opinion of everyone in the group. Once the list is ready, teachers can begin to use it consistently and regularly till it gets embedded in their practice. To manage time spent on scrutiny, teacher may:

- Address common errors in whole class feedback instead of writing in individual notebooks.
- Prioritize and inform students of any one area for correction. In an English class, for example, you may decide to focus on the use of tenses or organization of paragraphs. Similarly, in science or math focus on key concepts and not language errors.
- Provide detailed criteria of work, so students self-check before submitting – leaving very few errors in their work for you to check.

When you have created a classroom where corrections are seen as opportunities to learn, then you are ready for the next leap: getting students to correct their own work and that of their peers. With this changed perspective, issues of integrity and dishonesty seldom arise.

Peer and self-checking

By explicitly stating criteria for a task, or even sharing an example of task showcasing the standards you expect your students to meet, you provide opportunity for students to develop self-awareness, reflect on their work critically and take responsibility for improving their work- all at the same time!

Peer editing

This is a more advanced form of peer correction where students edit their work based on feedback received from peers. This also helps build students' competence in collaboration, communication, critical and reflective thinking, informed decision making and managing emotions and relationships.

High quality teacher feedback

While self and peer correction help in making students independent learners, detailed feedback

from the teacher periodically is indispensable to ensuring student progress. Having sessions either one on one or in small groups, provides learners with much needed guidance especially when it is:

- Personalized. Provides specific, concrete, and realistic suggestions to help the learner.
- Sensitive to self-esteem needs. Hit the ball not the player. When discussing errors, focus on the error and not who made it to save the student from shame/guilt.
- Comprehensible to the learner. Show and not tell the learner what to do and how.
- Given immediately so students relate to it, and it gets fixed quickly.

Once the students get into the habit of critiquing their own work, they will have enough impetus to pursue excellence. Our responsibility shifts then to ensuring the momentum is sustained. Of the many creative and myriad ways, the teaching community can come up with, one strategy that works well in any context is to celebrate students work through displays. It helps create a self-reliant and happy learning environment, makes learners productive and engaged and boosts their self-confidence. Assign a display space for students to showcase their work, use it as teaching tool, whenever opportunity presents itself. Just make sure that everyone has a designated space, and no one makes mean or hurtful comments on anyone's work.

One stumbling block for practitioners making their classrooms active and energized spaces for learners is facing criticism from supervisors, colleagues, and parents. There may be talk of too much noise, lack of 'teaching' and 'discipline' (read passive, disengaged learners) or teachers making students do their work!!

It is human nature to resist change and the best way to manage this change is to have everyone on board. Talk to the students and involve them in making rules for interactions and group work. Share with colleagues, supervisors, and parents what you plan to do, why you wish to do it and what it will look like in action. Ask for their help and support (people also love to be the giving-hand!!); they may not buy into your idea at once, but there will certainly be less resistance.

The author is Asst. Professor, School of Continuing Education and Research Center, Azim Premji University, Bangalore, and can be reached at <jwairia.saleem@apu.edu.in>.

Integrated approach to enhancement of students' speaking skill

Tenzing Rapgyal

What if most students of 9th and 10th standard appeared for an assessment of speaking skills and sat silent? What does one understand from this? What does one do about it?

My assumption is that at this stage, students have learnt enough English to be able to express themselves, but what stops them from speaking is their mental block. This block stems from lack of practice in speaking the language. The environment in many schools is such that the students do not get sufficient opportunities to speak English even in the English period!

I have tried different activities from the students speaking, after preparation, in front of the class on the topic of their choice to the students speaking extempore in front of the class and making presentations in English. But these activities do not

achieve the desired results as the students do not get sufficient opportunities. In a class of 30 to 35 students, for example, a student gets to speak only once or twice during an entire month. This is not enough. Also, shy students stay away from such activities.

What are my pedagogical objectives?

Students do not lack ideas, what they need help with is in organizing their ideas. In other words, similar to writing skills, their communicative competency suffers from incoherence and this affects their ability to speak fluently.

Generally, helping students enhance their speaking skill involves improving

- 1) Content
- 2) Fluency: coherence and language style
- 3) Accuracy

Rubric for the Assessment of Speaking Skill

Sr.No		4	3	2	1
1.	Content	*Relevant *Strong points *Lots of specific details	*Relevant *Strong points *Some specific details	*Relevant *Some weak points *Some specific details	*Relevant *All weak points *Some specific details
2.	Fluency	*Negligible hesitation *Cohesive *Coherent	*Some hesitation *Cohesive *Coherent	*Some hesitation *Lacks cohesiveness *Lacks coherence	*Lot of hesitation *No cohesiveness *Incoherent
3.	Accuracy	*Negligible error in grammar *Negligible error in pronunciation *Effective use of intonation	*Few errors in grammar *Few errors in pronunciation *Some use of intonation	*Some errors in grammar *Some errors in pronunciation *Less use of intonation	*Lots of errors in grammar *Lots of errors in pronunciation *Hardly used any intonation
4.	Presentation	*Maintains eye contact *Nods appropriately *Uses gestures *Takes initiative *Takes turn to speak *Motivates others	*Fulfil almost all the criteria	Fulfil some criteria	Fulfil few criteria

I have specifically focused on helping students improve their content and fluency.

What is my integrated approach to enhance students' speaking skills?

The approach consists of integrating speaking with pre-reading and post-reading activities.

Integrating speaking to pre-reading

Before reading a text: articles, stories, poems, or plays from the prescribed textbooks, all the activities are designed to be speaking using ASL (Assessment of Speaking and Listening) format:

- Introduction: Students introduce themselves.
- Topic presentation: Students have to plan before they speak on a given topic. This includes brainstorming on the topic, choosing the three best ideas, making a thesis statement, outlining the thesis and elaborating the main idea. After that students present their views on the given topic in accordance with the plan.
- Discussion topic: Usually a debatable topic related to the curriculum is given for extempore speaking. The students do not get time to prepare for the activity.
- Summing up: According to their weekly rotational roles, spokespersons of the groups have to sum up the main ideas of the group topic.
- Panel discussion: The respective spokespersons of the groups participate in the panel discussion on the discussion topic. They share their views on the topic and argue for or against the opinions of the other members of the panel.

Integrating speaking with post-reading

After reading a text from their prescribed book, students are engaged in the following speaking activities:

- Group discussion: Students discuss their doubts and questions from the text as well as beyond the text.

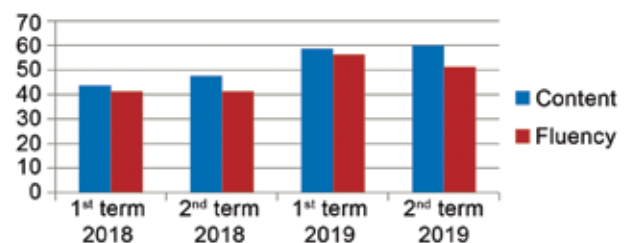
- Class discussion: The group discussion is followed by a class discussion. Spokespersons of the groups play an active role here as well. Also, doubts and questions remaining unresolved in the group discussion are clarified here.

The challenges I have faced

Conducting ASL of a large number of students before the term end, twice within an academic year, consumes a lot of time and energy. Besides, the entire exercise is taken up in haste to meet the mandatory CBSE requirements. So, I came up with the idea of incorporating it into the class routine. I have used this activity not only to assess students' speaking skills but also as a framework to structure their speaking activity. Therefore, instead of just twice a year, students practice their spoken English using this format every week.

What does the data reveal?

The following graph and table are the quantitative representation of the data collected based on the performance of the students in their speaking skills, viz., content and fluency, from 2018 to 2019.



Overall Effect of Integrated Approach to Enhancement of Students' Speaking Skill:2018-2019

	2018		2019		2018		2019	
	Content		Content		Fluency		Fluency	
	1 st Term	3 rd Term	1 st Term	3 rd Term	1 st Term	3 rd Term	1 st Term	3 rd Term
9 th Grade, Section S	1.6	1.9	2.4	2.4	1.5	1.7	2.3	2.1
9 th Grade, Section G	1.9	1.9	2.3	2.4	1.8	1.6	2.2	2.05
Average	1.75	1.9	2.35	2.4	1.65	1.65	2.25	2.05
%	43.75	47.5	58.75	60	41.25	41.25	56.25	51.25

Total number of students: 53

The graph highlights that there has been a steady rise in the content of students' spoken English as it increased from 43.75% in 2018 to 58.75% in 2019. Regarding the improvement in fluency, it progressed from 41.25% in 2018 to 56.25% in 2019. The strategies I have applied appear to have brought the desired results.

Improving a skill is a slow and long process. Therefore, the improvement in fluency has not caught up with the content, but the improvement in content must have pushed up their score for fluency because as per my assumption with regard to their proficiency in English, at the secondary level of schooling, students have learned enough English to express themselves. What impedes them is their mental block caused by the lack of skill in coming up with ideas and putting them in a coherent manner and their lack of confidence to speak in English due to the dearth of an English-speaking environment in our schools.

The author is P.G.T, English. He works at Tibetan Children's Village School in Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh. He can be reached at <tenrap83@gmail.com>.

Fostering engagement with materials: a collaborative

B. Ajitha



Photos courtesy: B. Ajitha

An effort to impart in-service training to teachers can be considered a success when there is evidence of receptivity to the ideas presented, a translation of the ideas into a plan of action and a commitment to see through the plan's implementation.

Applying these insights to the weekly in-house training programme at Delhi Public School, Coimbatore has helped improve the engagement levels as well motivation to learn among teachers.

Objectives

This study was undertaken to gauge the effectiveness of collaborative learning strategies to:

1. Address the attention deficit and disengagement among teacher trainees during the trainer-led pedagogy sessions.
2. Infuse enthusiasm among teachers towards learning and encourage openness to highly effective and result-oriented teaching strategies.

3. Create a culture of learning through vibrant discussions and deliberations on educational practices for better learning outcomes in students.
4. Encourage teachers to apply the insights gained from the training in everyday classroom instruction and lesson planning.

Intervention

The instructor-led pedagogy sessions primarily delivered in lecture method were found to be ineffective to engage the teachers throughout the sessions. This was despite the good presentation skills of the facilitator. To overcome this problem, in other words to encourage active participation of teachers, we focused our energies on two collaborative learning strategies, namely Jigsaw Strategy and Reciprocal Teaching.

A six week long in-house training programme was organized. The learning material on fundamentals of learning and inclusive teaching was shared with the

learning approach



teachers. The teachers were then asked to split into small groups to engage with the material, to have detailed discussions, and to clarify misconceptions. By the end of six weeks, they were expected to have a better understanding and awareness on the efficacy of the material in everyday classroom teaching.

Jigsaw Strategy

Jigsaw, one of the many popular collaborative learning strategies in practice worldwide, was chosen to introduce new learning material to teachers, aid comprehension, and appreciate its implication for the teaching-learning process.

A relevant and useful four-week long course on the learning process titled *Uncommon Sense Teaching* was identified (accessed through the MOOC platform COURSERA) and shared with the teachers. Each of the four videos could be accessed by the teachers one day prior to the training session. This strategy

was used for the entire learning material of the identified course.

Teachers were first put in groups of four. These groups were named the breakout groups. Expert groups (so called because of the in-depth knowledge of teaching-learning material that the members gain out of discussions in this group) were then formed from the breakout groups.

The discussions first began in the four expert groups, where all the participant teachers were assigned evenly to the four groups. Each group watched the assigned videos on the topic. The teachers made notes on these videos. This was followed by a discussion where the teachers compared notes to deepen their comprehension. They also clarified misconceptions they had while interacting with the material on their own.

With a deeper and broader understanding of the material reached through the discussions in the expert groups, teachers then returned to their breakout groups. Here one member from each of the four expert groups gave an informal presentation of the insights garnered from engagement with the assigned material.

At the end of the presentations, the teachers left the session not only with enhanced understanding of the learning material and its implications for teaching but also with a sense of agency to apply the pedagogical principles in everyday classroom teaching.

This strategy was also adopted for the virtual mode using Google Meet. Grouping of teachers was shared via a Google Sheet which also had details of the learning modules assigned to each of the expert groups, meeting links for both breakout and expert groups. It also had names of teachers designated to create the meeting links and facilitate the discussions in the respective groups.

Reciprocal Teaching

Another tested technique for collaborative learning – Reciprocal Teaching – was also used during the teacher training session. This technique availed to enhance comprehension of difficult texts by means of assigning clear-cut roles to group members while interacting with the given texts.

For the two subsequent weeks of the training sessions, articles from the education site for teachers- *Edutopia* were selected. The teachers had to evaluate



one of the many structured approaches to integrate differentiated instruction in classroom teaching and ideate on its adaptation in their classroom instruction.

The entire lot of teachers were divided into groups of four. Handouts of the articles along with a graphic organizer were distributed to aid discussion and scaffold learning. The strategy involves four distinct processes namely predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing – each of which were modelled to the teachers and are described below:

Predicting: Teachers, in groups, wrote down what they thought the topic of the learning material entails. This was based on whatever they were able to infer from the heading, sub-headings, illustrations and infographics prior to reading the article in the handout. Later, after reading the article, they had to either confirm or reject their predictions based on the evidence they encountered in the article.

Questioning: As teachers read the material, they noted questions that arose in their mind with respect to its teaching implication in their classroom. Questions they could discuss with others teachers in the group.

Clarifying: Whenever a question about the adoption of teaching ideas presented in the material cropped up or parts of the material warranted clarity, possibly on account of reference to unfamiliar tools, techniques or terminology, teachers were encouraged to search online or seek help from others in the group.

Summarizing: After engaging with the learning material through the three processes outlined above, each group fielded a teacher to summarize the key takeaways the group had collectively arrived at to everyone one present.

Findings

- a. Grouping in small numbers make teachers comfortable to open up, discuss and share freely in a non-judgemental and fear-free environment. This rarely happens in large groups or during formal interactions.
- b. Teachers feel valued for having an equal say and having contributed meaningfully when the context is well-defined and focussed during the discussion phase in expert groups.
- c. Each teacher gets engaged in absorbing the content and understanding its implications in teaching.
- d. The discussions in the expert group facilitate better assimilation and internalization of the principles.
- e. Since every teacher has to go back to the breakout/jigsaw groups to make an informal presentation about the learning insights garnered during the discussion in the expert groups, he/she is completely invested in the learning process.
- f. Collaborative learning fosters a conducive learning environment for teachers to share insights on the learning modules based on their own real classroom experiences thus creating a culture of sharing best practices through peer learning.
- g. The Jigsaw Strategy was preferred over the Reciprocal Teaching collaborative strategy chiefly because the variation of the Reciprocal Teaching strategy used in the training was poorly executed. A better and more effective variation of the Reciprocal Teaching strategy where roles are assigned to model each cognitive process and keep changing for different chunks of the learning material would have yielded better results in making every group member accountable and

engaged through active participation as evidenced in the Jigsaw Strategy.

Limitations

The following glitches were experienced while using the two collaborative learning strategies:

- a) The discussions in groups may not be well regulated or moderated. This can lead to digression from the topic.
- b) These strategies do not bode well with a significant percentage of teachers who process information better and consequently internalize ideas by going over the learning content in a self-paced manner.
- c) Strong opinions articulated and confrontationist attitude exhibited by dominant members during discussions can affect the group dynamics and become an obstacle in free exchange of perspectives and interpretations.
- d) Prolonged discussions in expert groups using Jigsaw Strategy leaves less time for presentation in breakout groups.
- e) Asking teachers to carry out all the four processes in the Reciprocal Teaching strategy individually through the use of the graphic organizer did not prove very effective. Individual accountability was found missing among those teachers who took a back seat by relinquishing their contribution to the articulate ones in the group.

Conclusions

1. The benefits of using collaborative learning strategies are far too many to be ignored. The simple strategies when planned and implemented properly serve well to make the training sessions interactive, engaging, and act as a stimulus for learning.
2. Learning through collaboration not only relieves monotony of plodding through new learning material alone and struggling to see the immediate application in localized context but offers space to air and clear misconceptions, clarify and broaden one's understanding by being receptive to multiple perspectives and interpretations.
3. Learning is made joyful through the opportunity to have an immersive learning experience through stimulating interactions among teachers, thus motivating them to experiment with the pedagogical ideas in actual classroom scenario rather than just retaining the theoretical knowledge in their teaching repertoire.

4. Goal directed task management enables meaningful interactions and ensures both individual as well as group accountability towards learning.
5. Limitations of using cooperative learning strategies can be overcome with clear cut instructions on the code of conduct and time management that would regulate the sessions and realize the intended objectives.
6. Assessment is a key factor to check for learning gaps and plug them immediately. So, immediate feedback in the form of a quiz needs to be integrated into every training session to complete the learning cycle.
7. Having had a firsthand experience of how joyful and effective collaborative learning strategies are in promoting good learning, teachers have the added advantage of knowing the nitty gritty of these powerful strategies in order to use them in the classroom for an invigorating learning experience for their students.

Note: The collaborative learning strategy was first used in Teacher Training in January 2022 at Delhi Public School, Coimbatore in the online mode. After seeing the positive impact, the effective use of the strategy has had on the quality of training, it has now become the mainstay of the in-house training programme and is being successfully used week after week with the added component of assessment in the form of multiple-choice quiz that teachers take at the end of the presentations in the breakout groups. The assessment makes the learning cycle complete and fosters a spirit of competition among the groups!

References

- A brief overview of the Jigsaw Strategy:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=euhtXUgBEts>
- A demonstration of Reciprocal Teaching in actual class setting:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8oXskcnb4RA&t=33s>

The author is the Lead Teacher, Training at Delhi Public School Patna, Pune, Ludhiana and Coimbatore functioning under the aegis of the Takshila Educational Society. She teaches English and Life Skills at senior and senior secondary levels at Delhi Public School Coimbatore and can be reached at <ajithabashkar@gmail.com>.

Turning the pages of history

Amita Prasad

Non-violence – a weapon of the strong



Photo courtesy: Indian Embassy in Jordan commons.wikimedia.org

Satyagraha was a unique technique devised by Gandhiji to protest against the wrongdoings of the British Raj. He had used it successfully in South Africa and on his return to India, he used it first in Champaran to fight for the rights of the indigo cultivators.

Satyagraha was based on the twin principles of Satya (Truth) and Ahimsa (Non-violence). According to Gandhiji, "Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man."

1. What do you think is the "mightiest weapon of destruction" devised by man? Why do you think so? Look at the pictures below for some options (nuclear weapons, biological warfare, chemical warfare) – or you can think of others.



Photo courtesy: www.unsplash.com



Photo courtesy: Frank Hurley – State Library of New South Wales, <https://commons.wikimedia.org>



Photo courtesy: Charles Levy – U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/>

When Gandhi announced the Salt Satyagraha, many Congress leaders including Gandhi's supporters were sceptical. "We were bewildered and could not fit in a national struggle with common salt," remembered Jawaharlal Nehru. Yet, in hindsight, historians agree that it was an act of political genius, for the British monopoly over the salt trade made it a prime example of the unfair policies of the Raj. Tens of thousands of protesters joined Gandhi when he gave the call for Civil Disobedience.



Photo courtesy: commons.wikimedia.org



Photo courtesy: Yann (talk). <https://commons.wikimedia.org/>

2. Why do you think Gandhi chose to protest against the salt tax?
3. The British arrested some 60,000 people for participating in the Civil Disobedience campaign. Volunteers gladly went to jail and some even courted arrest. Why do you think they did this?

As Gandhi broke the Salt Law, he said “With this I am shaking the foundations of the British Empire.”

In his 1950 biography of Gandhi, Louis Fischer wrote about the legacy of the Salt March: “India was now free,” he writes. “Technically, legally, nothing had changed. India was still a British colony.” And yet, after the Salt Satyagraha, “it was inevitable that Britain should some day refuse to rule India and that India should some day refuse to be ruled.”

4. Why do you think Louis Fischer described India as “free” – even though (as we know) independence was still more than 15 years away?
5. Do you agree that Gandhi successfully shook “the foundations of the British Empire”?

In May 1930, Gandhi announced his decision to raid the salt works at Dharasana. Immediately, all the prominent Congress leaders including Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Sardar Patel were arrested. However, Sarojini Naidu and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad led the peaceful agitation.

The Satyagrahis were arrested in large numbers and the British did not hesitate to use brute force to suppress them. American journalist Webb Miller has left a poignant eye-witness account of the incident.

This is what he wrote: “Suddenly, at a word of command, scores of native police rushed upon the advancing marchers and rained blows on their heads with their steel-shod lathis [batons]. Not one of the marchers even raised an arm to fend off the blows. They went down like ten-pins. From where I stood, I heard the sickening whacks of the clubs on unprotected skulls. The waiting crowd of watchers groaned and sucked in their breaths in sympathetic pain at every blow. Those struck down fell sprawling, unconscious or writhing in pain with fractured skulls or broken shoulders. In two or three minutes the ground was quilted with bodies. Great patches of blood widened on their white clothes. The survivors without breaking ranks silently and doggedly marched on until struck down...They marched slowly towards the police. Although everyone knew that within a few minutes he would be beaten down, perhaps killed, I could detect no signs of wavering or fear. They marched steadily with heads up, without any possibility that they might escape serious injury or death.”

6. Webb Miller’s account appeared in 1350 newspapers across the world. What impact do you think this would have had on world opinion about British rule in India?
7. What do you think gave the Satyagrahis the inner strength to face this brutality?

Judith Brown writes, Gandhi “grasped intuitively that civil resistance was in many ways an exercise in political theater, where the audience was as important as the actors.”

Gandhi himself wrote in 1920, “The religion of non-violence is not meant merely for the rishis and saints. It is meant for the common people as well. Non-violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute... The dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law – to the strength of the spirit...”

8. Do you agree that Satyagraha was, in reality, nothing more than “political theatre”?
9. Do you think human beings are fundamentally non-violent? Think of the long history of wars down the ages. How does this make you feel about Gandhiji’s philosophy of life and his commitment to his beliefs?



Photo: gandhiserve.org, <https://commons.wikimedia.org>

Gandhi said, “An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind”.

He argued that violence only begets greater violence. Non-violence, on the other hand, in his own words “does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil doer, but it means putting of one’s whole soul against the will of the tyrant. Working under this law of our being, it is possible for a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust empire.” “My ambition,” he wrote, “is no less than to convert the British people through non-violence and thus make them see the wrong they have done to India.”

10. In view of Gandhiji’s role in our freedom struggle, do you agree that a single individual can defy the might of an empire?

11. Do you think he fulfilled his ambition to make the British see the wrong they had done to India?

Saza – E – Kalapani

The very name Cellular Jail in Port Blair, Andaman Islands, was enough to send shivers down the spine of even the bravest of the brave. It was the most dreaded prison where freedom fighters were incarcerated by the British Raj.

In the aftermath of the Revolt of 1857, the British considered the remote islands a suitable place to punish those who had fought against them. The prisoners were used as labourers to do construction work. But by the end of the 19th century, as the freedom struggle picked up, the British felt the need for a high security prison that would give the convicts suitably harsh treatment. The outcome was the construction of the Cellular Jail between 1896 – 1906.



Originally the Cellular Jail had seven wings, each three storeyed and all were connected to a central tower. This tower also served as a watch tower from where the guards could keep vigil on all the wings.

The wings were constructed in such a manner that the front of one wing faced the back of another, so that one inmate in a wing could not see or communicate with another inmate in any of the adjacent wings.

Each cell housed only one prisoner thus isolating them. Even the cells in a wing were in a row so that inmates in the same wing could not see each other. There were 693 cells.



This feature of solitary confinement in individual cells earned the jail its name, “Cellular”.

1. Why do you think the jail was designed in such a way that the prisoners would not be able to see or communicate with each other?
2. How would you feel if you had to spend weeks and months without seeing anyone? Write down your thoughts.



Look at the picture. It shows you that the locks of the prison cells were designed in such a way that the inmate would never be able to reach the latch of the lock. Even if the inmate would try to put his hand out and try to unlock the door, he would never be able to do so.

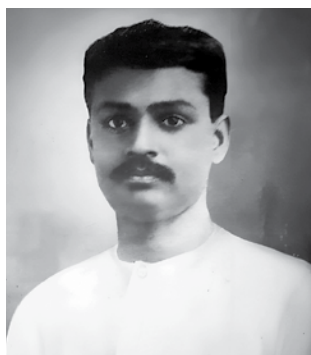
3. Imagine you are a prisoner in the Cellular Jail. Would you try to escape? Write a paragraph on what you would do.

The revolutionaries who were imprisoned in the Cellular Jail were not treated as political prisoners but were treated worse than ordinary criminals. All kinds of torture from the jail authorities ranging from backbreaking manual work and terrible food to the hurling of abuses and flogging were the routine. Many freedom fighters in the jail went through inhuman torture.

4. Do you think that political prisoners should be treated like criminals and tortured? Give reasons for your answer,



Batukeshwar Dutt



Sachindranath Sanyal



Vinayak Damodar Savarkar
(Popularly referred to as Veer Savarkar)

These were some famous freedom fighters who were incarcerated in the Cellular Jail. The jail inmates observed hunger strikes in the early 1930s to protest against the miserable conditions in the jail. They were tortured, some were beaten to death, some hanged themselves, some tried to escape and were caught and executed.

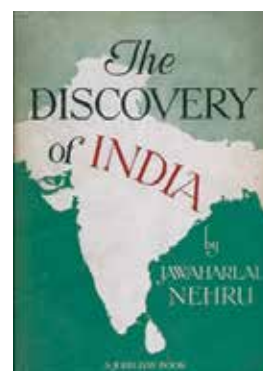


The gallows in the Cellular Jail – 3 prisoners could be hanged at a time.

Did you know?

Jawaharlal Nehru spent 3259 days (that is, almost 9 years!) in jail. He was incarcerated for varying lengths of time in different jails – mostly in Allahabad, Dehradun, Lucknow, Almora, Ahmednagar and Bareilly.

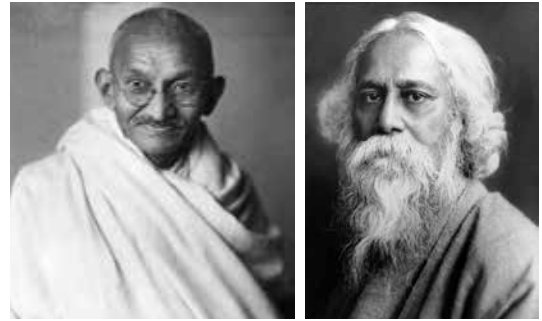
During his imprisonment in Ahmednagar from 1942-45, he wrote the masterpiece *The Discovery of India* which traces India's history from the Harappan Civilization down to the last years of the British Raj. In writing the book Nehru drew upon his vast knowledge of Indian history, philosophy and culture as well as conversations with his fellow prisoners, especially Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Govind Ballabh Pant and Asaf Ali. They also participated in proofreading Nehru's work and providing him with creative suggestions.



5. If you were to write a book today about India's history, where would you get your information from?

6. What do you think gave the prisoners the strength to bear the long years of torture and suffering? Imagine that you are a prisoner – write a journal describing your thoughts and feelings.

Gandhiji and Rabindranath Tagore led a campaign demanding that the British authorities shut down the jail and by 1939, the prisoners were repatriated. The jail was declared a national memorial in 1979 and is open to the public. Its museum gives visitors a glimpse of the struggle of our freedom fighters.



Bravehearts!

Quiz time!

Look at the pictures below and find a connection between the five great people (other than the fact that they were all freedom fighters).



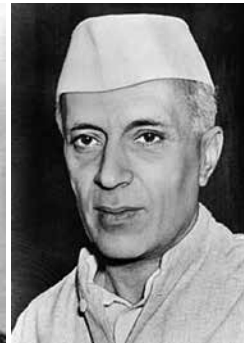
Mahatma Gandhi



Subhas Chandra Bose



Maulana Azad



Jawaharlal Nehru



Rani of Jhansi

Did you know? Five regiments of the Azad Hind Fauz (Indian National Army or INA) were named after them.

The Rani of Jhansi Regiment was the first all-women regiment in the history of the Indian Army. It was composed of Indian women who were recruited from Southeast Asia, mostly from Singapore and Malaya.

1. You must have read about Rani Lakshmibai who fought against the British to defend her kingdom Jhansi in 1857-58. Why do you think 85 years later, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose named the women's regiment after the Rani of Jhansi?



Lakshmi Swaminathan

The regiment was led by Lakshmi Swaminathan (later Lakshmi Sahgal) – or Captain Lakshmi as she was called.

Isn't it a remarkable coincidence that the Captain of the Rani of Jhansi regiment was a woman named Lakshmi!

She was a 28-year-old doctor and during the surrender of Singapore to the Japanese, she helped the prisoners of war. In July 1943, when Subhas Chandra Bose arrived in Singapore, she met him and got his consent to set up a women's regiment of the Indian National Army.

Netaji believed that unless women played their part in the freedom struggle, India could not hope to be free. He said famously, "In the last and final War of Independence, we want not one but thousands of Ranis of Jhansi."

2. Do you think that as we celebrate 75 years of freedom, women in present day India are as emancipated as the Ranis of the INA?

Janaki Thevar, aged just 18, became the second-in-command. There is a famous anecdote about her. When Netaji came to Kuala Lumpur, she cycled to the rally without telling her parents. When he called for donations, she went up to the stage, took off her gold earrings and necklace and gave them to him. She hoped that her parents would not notice her missing ornaments, but the next morning there was a picture of her handing over the jewellery to Netaji on the front page of the local newspaper!

3. Something to think about – What would you be willing to give up for a cause – say for our nation or to save the environment or for the welfare of an underprivileged child?

Subhas Chandra Bose upheld two role models for the women soldiers in the INA – Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi and Joan of Arc of France.

Joan of Arc was a controversial personality in her time. Today, she is honoured as a saint and defender of the French nation, but back in the 15th century, she was accused of heresy (going against the beliefs of the church) and burned at the stake at the age of about 19. The “wrongs” she was accused of included wearing men’s clothes and carrying arms.



Joan of Arc

4. As you can see, norms of dressing change with the times. What is perfectly acceptable in our times was not acceptable earlier. Can you think of more examples from Indian history?



Netaji reviewing the Rani of Jhansi regiment – beside him is Captain Lakshmi.

The “Ranis” wore smart khaki uniforms – Jodhpur breeches with tucked-in bush shirts and black buckled shoes. The cap was the same as the one worn by the male soldiers of the INA.

When the Japanese heard about the Rani of Jhansi regiment, they were amazed. The senior military officers considered women soldiers an absurd thought and their training a waste of ammunition.

However, the regiment fought bravely against the British. During the retreat of the forces in Burma (now Myanmar) they had to march in perilous conditions carrying their rifles and heavy backpacks – wading through mud and crossing deep rivers where the water rose up to their necks, while the skies were filled with enemy airplanes raining bombs. Sadly, they did not get an opportunity to fight on Indian soil.

Listen to the beautiful lyrics of the anthem of the Provisional Government of Free India here. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRgrmM_NBUo

Listen to the rousing marching song of the Indian National Army here. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J4K5rzCybr0>



Flag of Azad Hind

“In the entire history of World War II, there is no other example of such a force, led by and composed of women,” writes Sumantra Bose in his book *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose’s Life, Politics & Struggle*. “Even today, women participating in actual combat is very rare anywhere in the world, and all-women military units are practically unheard of.”

The Rani of Jhansi Regiment remains an important symbol of women's participation in the struggle for Indian independence, and its legacy has inspired generations of women in India and beyond.

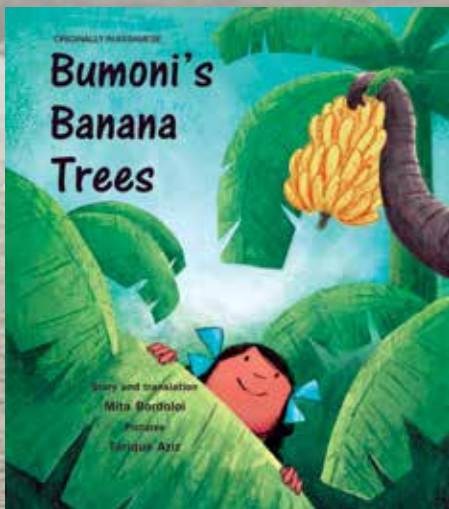
5. What inspiration do you draw from the bravehearts who were part of the Rani of Jhansi regiment?

Amita Prasad is a passionate teacher of history with over 25 years of classroom experience. She is currently Director, Indus Valley World School, Kolkata. She can be reached at <amitapras@gmail.com>.

Our journey to Kaziranga National Park

Lakshmi Mitter

The question “What do you understand about human-animal conflict?” elicited varied responses from the 8–11-year-olds, such as: “I know what ‘conflict’ means, but I don’t know what ‘human animal-conflict could mean.” “Maybe it means humans fighting with animals,” said another. “Fighting with animals as in fighting for something? Humans may need animals for something and to capture them they need to fight.”



As I listened to this conversation, it occurred to me that those of us who live in urban areas seldom encounter wildlife and are therefore unfamiliar and not very sensitive towards other creatures. Our association with wildlife is limited to books or the

nature in *Teacher Plus* (February 2023). The article introduced me to a wonderful book, *Bumoni's Banana Trees* written by Mita Bordoloi and illustrated by Tariq Aziz. In the book, the protagonist, Bumoni sees elephants from the Kaziranga National Park visit their backyard to eat bananas. This goes on for consecutive nights. The family is forced to think of way to stop the damage, but Bumoni also wants to help the elephants!

My mother, who also read the article, gifted this book to an eight-year-old and was keen to have a fruitful discussion with the child's mother about their reading experience. Much to her annoyance, the child's mother said her child had read the book and would like to return it so that it could be passed on. More than the shock of seeing her well-intended gift being returned without any appreciation, the fact that this mother and child could not enjoy some time together reading and talking about the book appalled her.

What would it be like to read *Bumoni's Banana Trees* together?

My mother and I talked about the book at length and the lukewarm reaction from the child's mother.

It occurred to both of us that probably the child had been given the book and asked to read by himself. It's likely that once he finished, he gave it back to his mother and it ended there.

television; at the most some of us might have gone on a wildlife safari. We may or may not be able to do much in terms of conserving wildlife, but knowing why it is important is something we must be aware of. Just as these thoughts started taking root in my mind, I read an interesting article titled, *In harmony with*

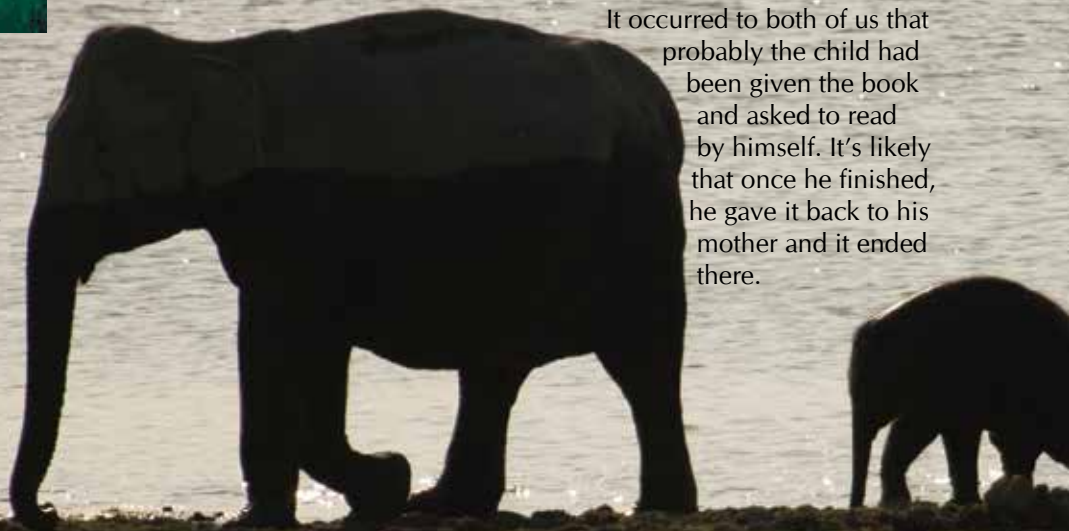


Photo: Dharmendra Khandal

We went back to the article, *In harmony with nature*, and discovered that it suggested that the book be read and enjoyed in a group. I decided to give it a try and introduced the book to my young reading companions (8-11 years of age).

We first spoke about human-animal conflict and then opened the book. The very enthusiastic group of readers were drawn in right away on seeing Bumoni walk out of her backyard plantation, looking happy, holding lots of bananas, and her dog following her with a banana. We talked about what it would be like to have a big banana plantation in our backyards. Interestingly, the concept of a backyard itself was new for many children suggesting that the only kind of homes they have known are apartments. But that did not stop them from coming up with business propositions to sell the extra bananas after Bumoni's family had had their share. The young always teach us to think forward.

As we read along, we looked up images of banana blossoms. Some had tasted it and said they hated it. My telling them of its health benefits fell on deaf ears. Others who had neither seen nor eaten it were fascinated with its many layers and the time and effort it takes for preparation before it can be consumed. Each child, however, had eaten on a plantain leaf.

When we got to the crux of the story where Bumoni's family has a problem to solve, the group had interesting reactions. Here are a few:

1. Let's block the river to prevent animals from the forest from crossing, but that's cruel.
2. What if we build a fence around the plantation?

3. What if we call the forest department for help? Perhaps they don't know.
4. What if we call animal caretakers for help?
5. What if we make provisions to feed the animals who crossover from the forest to the fields?
6. Can the zookeepers help? This question led to an older child in the group explaining the difference between a National Park and a zoo. Furthermore, the group realized that National Parks are wilderness areas (usually large) that are home to many species while zoos have select species in captivity.
7. Why do we need wildlife when all they seem to do is to cause trouble? Why conserving wildlife is crucial for human existence? The children began to appreciate that it is not only a question of empathy towards animals but also a matter of ecological balance – not just about one of us but about all of us. That discovery at some level became possible, thanks to this book.

Talking about how this book came into being

The author Mita Bordolai wrote this book with a purpose. But how did she get the idea? We read the interview that was part of the *Teacher Plus* article. Most came to know about the Kaziranga National Park for the first time while a couple knew about it from their textbooks and maps. However, beyond that they knew very little about it. The interview in the article gave the children an inside look into how this fascinating book came into being. At the end, a young reader observed that while coming in close proximity of wild elephants would have been a scary experience for those who were at close quarters, for the readers it was definitely a major learning.

The author is the founder of Talking Circles – an online cohort-based learning program. She can be reached at [<lakshmi@talkingcircles.in>](mailto:lakshmi@talkingcircles.in).



Communication Skills

Challenging English language

Spatica Ramanujam

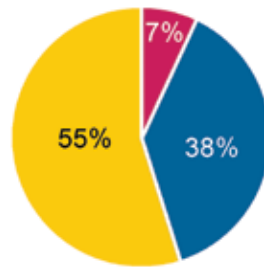
When we refer to someone as having good communication skills, an image of a persuasive speaker with impeccable English language often comes to mind. Good communication skills have come to be synonymous with 'making a good impression'.

Many undergraduate programme syllabi are geared towards meeting this 'requirement' of the 'professional world'. While almost all of the syllabi mention 'confidence', the question is, how does a student become a 'confident' communicator in a country like India where English language training dominates communication skills courses and students possess varying degrees of English language competency?

If we are to train students to be effective communicators, we must take into account their diverse competency levels in English and develop a pedagogical approach where this diversity becomes an asset, not an obstacle.

Professor Mehrabian's* Communication Model challenges the popular notion of 'effective communication'. He proposes that there are three core elements in the act of communication – Verbal (spoken words), Tone of voice, and Non-verbal (Body language, Facial Expressions). Out of these, body language accounts for 55 per cent, non-verbal 38 per cent, and verbal a mere 7 per cent. Language competency is just one of the elements of communication and the one with the smallest share in the proverbial communication pie. Despite this, the education system primarily relies on the written or spoken word.

*[https://www.bl.uk/people/albert-mehrabian#:~:text=Professor%20Mehrabian%20\(1939%2D\)%20believes,meaning%20of%20the%20spoken%20word](https://www.bl.uk/people/albert-mehrabian#:~:text=Professor%20Mehrabian%20(1939%2D)%20believes,meaning%20of%20the%20spoken%20word)



Elements of Personal Communication

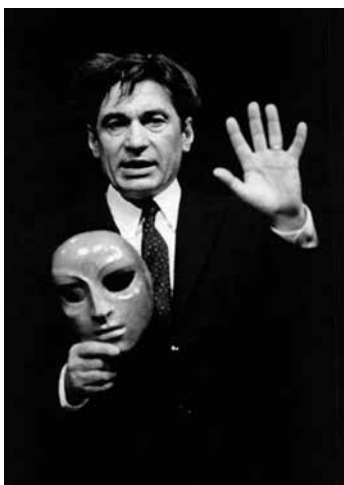
- 7% spoken words
- 38% voice, tone
- 55% body language

Source: Professor Albert Mehrabian, University of California Los Angeles

A communication skills teacher needs to focus on non-verbal communication and not look at it merely as a tool that supports verbal communication. Communication is an instinctive act for humans and the teacher must create a safe space for this instinct to find expression. For this, it is first important to create an atmosphere of playfulness in the classroom. As Donald Winnicott mentions in his book, *Playing and Reality*, "It is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self." Winnicott's distinctive contribution to our understanding of human development, based on extensive clinical work with babies and young children as a paediatrician, is known and valued the world over. In *Playing and Reality*, he is concerned with the springs of imaginative living and of cultural experience in every sense, with whatever determines an individual's capacity to live creatively and to find life worth living.

How then to create this sense of play in the classroom? Jacques Le Coq, a physical theatre teacher and founder of the Le Coq School in Paris referred to this sense of 'playfulness' as '*folie*' (French). Inspired by the 'Geometry of Movement' and the 'Poetry of Athletics' in sports, Le Coq developed a unique physical theatre pedagogy called *auto-course* or self-course based on his passion and research into movement. Students at the Le Coq School undergo a journey of two years – during which they move along two parallel paths: Study of improvisation and movement technique and its analysis.

dominance in the classroom



Jacques Le Coq teaching the Neutral Mask

(Source: <https://cultureexchange1.wordpress.com/2017/01/24/jacques-lecoq-the-physical-revolution-of-theater/>)

“presence” on stage.

The neutral mask shuts off the normal cues from facial expression and unfolds the communication beneath this. Participants find through observing the neutral mask the astounding fact that when worn by others, it seems as though the mask itself changes. The same mask on two different people can look radically different. We may be drawn to specific aspects of the mask, the mouth, the brow lines, or the length. Similarly, the audience may perceive a certain emotion or archetype arise when the mask is worn.

The mask allows for a state of openness and calm, where the student is encouraged to respond to the outside world becoming acutely aware of body, gesture, movement and rhythm. The face is hidden and the student is encouraged to bring alive the body to communicate.

Being a student of the LeCoq pedagogy in a theatre and performance context, I discovered a great sense

What is of particular significance is the work with the Neutral Mask, the first mask that the student encounters. The neutral mask is a practice to sharpen awareness of a performer to their body language and non-verbal communication. This interweaves their posture, breath, centre of gravity and relationship to space, to create a performer's

of freedom of expression and an acute awareness of gesture and body language. I also began to trust my impulse as a performer.

As a Communication Skills teacher at Vidyashilp University, I have applied this pedagogical approach to teaching and facilitation in the classroom. The Communication Skills course at the University is mandatory for students across disciplines. The University has a rich diversity of students from rural and urban backgrounds. These students possess varying degrees of competency in English.

The LeCoq pedagogy enables learning to occur without language becoming a barrier, thereby giving students an opportunity to be their most expressive, confident selves. In the academic context, the pedagogy enables the learner to explore three pillars of expression that are important for any act of communication – Voice, Body and Imagination. This is achieved by students engaging in improvisation, imagination-based activities, and movement.

The improvisation activity, ‘Waiting for the Guest’, illustrates the role of body and imagination as key components of communication. The brief given to the students is as follows –

“You have been invited by the Chief Minister of your state for a dinner party. You don’t know what he/she looks like but you are excited to be invited to this event.”

Background and instructions for the students – The guests have never met each other before. Students are given a detailed ‘walk through’ from the entrance to the room of the house where all the food is laid out and where they must wait for the Chief Minister to make his/her appearance.

The students don’t know if they will be the first, second, third ...nth guest, they find themselves confronted with a silent situation, not daring to speak, rather as if they are in a waiting room.”



Source: <https://www.teatraccio.es/en/sin-categoria-es/curso-intensivo-mascara-neutra-2/>

(Improvisation exercise adapted from Le Coq' Book, The Moving Body, World at is Movements chapter)

During this exercise in the classroom, the students employed different non-verbal communication techniques. These included facial expression, eye contact, body language and breath. Body language, for example, was effectively put to use to communicate restlessness and breath to communicate relief. These would have remained unexplored if verbal communication had been employed as the first pre-requisite to learn communication. It also placed all the students on an equal footing at the beginning.

Many students shared that they were acutely aware of the physical space, how their bodies were placed in the space, their distance from the audience and from fellow improvisers. They expressed that their imagination was stirred and guided them to truthfully communicate the geographical space they were inhabiting.

The students also shared that they struggled against the impulse to break into words and this constraint enabled them to communicate more with their bodies.

It is after this and many such activities to encourage non-verbal and imagination-led communication, that vocal activity was introduced to the students. They were given famous speeches to practice voice projection and clarity. This exercise, however, did

not focus on their grammatical skills. It encouraged them to approach the text more as a bunch of 'sounds' and express the sound quality of each letter truthfully. It was only until after the exploration that they were told about the vowel and consonant sounds.

A BTech Data Science student who is not fluent in English shared, "The voice exercises helped me bring my full attention to pronouncing the words properly...I observed this also about a classmate who I could never hear speak clearly before who I found to be projecting his voice and speaking clearly as the course progressed...."

A Bachelors, Design (BDes) student who is fluent in English shared, "I struggled with body language and eye contact, but as the course progressed, I found myself getting more comfortable with speaking to a crowd and maintaining eye contact. Also, another element that really helped was the focus on breath, I used to talk really fast when I started and I was uncomfortable and awkward with silences, but the focus on breath helped me to space out my speech... I also could observe a change in my friend who was shy and couldn't keep eye contact previously. Towards the end of the course I found her to be a much better communicator."

These students also shared how the Communication Skills course helped them in other courses.

The BTech Data Science student shared, "I was able to use the storytelling module from the Communication Skills to design my presentation in the Foundation to Data Science (FDS) course".

The BDes student shared, "Around the same time as this course, I had my first assessment presentation in design and was able to confidently present for that assessment. I used to be low on confidence previously but this course helped me be a confident presenter."

Another significant feature of this pedagogy is giving feedback. The students became competent at giving each other feedback and developed skills on how to give feedback. The pedagogy highlighted the importance of feedback as a very relevant aspect of interpersonal communication. As Le Coq states in his book, *The Moving Body*, "My first response to any performer's improvisation or exercise is to make observations, which are not to be confused with opinions....observations are made by the teacher surrounded by the students. While I am observing, I

sense the students anticipating what I shall say. My job is to articulate the observation, but it must be shared by all. There is not much point after seeing an improvisation in a teacher saying, 'that gave me pleasure' or 'I liked that a lot'. Different people will look at different things. But for an observation to be made one must pay close attention to the living process, while trying to be as objective as possible."

The students had the opportunity to engage in peer feedback. This formed a part of their assessment when the 'intention' model of communication was introduced in class. Each pair of students were given a short two hander scene from a play where they had to portray a character's unsaid intention of the character through non-verbal communication. The approach to understanding and playing intention was to be comfortable with and to lend meaning to silence before and after text, to and understand how silences and pauses form an integral part of meaning making. As Le Coq says, "words are born from silence."

The assessments also centred on students being able to present content around topics like "an important event of my life" or "speak about an issue you are motivated by" which helped them speak about their own truth and develop sensitivity towards other people's realities, backgrounds and contexts.

One of the students was able to confidently talk about 'stigma around menstruation' in Uttar Pradesh in her final presentation. From being shy and very soft spoken at the beginning, she was able to speak her truth confidently towards the end of the course.

The challenges of applying this pedagogical approach are also many. Not all students are able to overcome their inhibitions to engage in 'folie' that is required of many experiential activities/ improvisations. Such a practice based course needs exactly that...'practice'. And however successful such a pedagogical approach maybe, it will fail to realize its learning outcomes unless it is reinforced in other courses, other domains.

The author is an Assistant Professor at Vidyashilp University. She teaches communication skills, leadership and teamwork skills and theatre. She is also a theatre practitioner and artistic director of the theatre company, Mukha Mugam. She has facilitated many arts integration programmes for educational institutions in India and abroad, providing focused theatre and storytelling training for teachers, students, and storytellers for over 10 years. She can be reached at <spatica.r@vidyashilp.edu.in>.

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Can a school be happy with unhappy teachers?

Shabira Banu

Teachers are among of the strongest pillars of education. Everyone wishes to have a happy school. But how can a school be happy if the teachers are unhappy?

I once wondered on being asked if I was a teacher by chance or choice. I don't think anyone has ever asked whether an engineer, or a doctor, or an architect has become one by chance or choice. Then why ask a teacher? Very unfair, don't you think?

With such assumptions around the teaching profession, it is only the school that can uphold the teachers' honour or dignity and make them feel important. Unfortunately, not many are privileged to get the respect they deserve.

When you expect that students must be treated well and given a chance to correct their errors, then why is there a different rule for teachers? Teachers are human beings too, trust them. I remember once arranging proxies for the wrong day. My heart skipped a beat on realizing the error and imagining the consequences that I would have to face.

Surprisingly, however, I was told by my coordinator, "No problem, ma'am, it's ok. We will quickly reschedule it. Let me help you." It was such a relief that it made me work rigorously and happily without any fear of being taken to task.

This small gesture of my coordinator towards me was that *aha* moment where I realized that one must be empathetic towards students. I understood how a student must feel on writing the wrong answer, or forgetting a book, or on failing to follow an instruction. When I, like my generous coordinator, surprise them by giving them another chance, they come up with better work and we start sharing a special bond called 'TRUST', which is the foundation for a happy environment. The change reaction doesn't stop here. It is seen even in students. When asked to work in groups, there is always a chance of differences coming up with someone doing more work and someone else delaying it. I could see how my children, instead of getting frustrated with the member delaying the work, try and find out the reason for the delay and help the member to get it





done on time which is in a true sense, collaboration and cooperation. This again becomes a reason for a happy group, happy students and happy school!

On the other hand, distrust, disrespect, and ill-treatment make for an unhappy teacher. I remember how distressing it was once for our team to work with a tyrant leader. The innumerable changes in rules, blocking the channels of communication, restrictions on talking or laughing, inconsiderate deadlines, humiliating remarks in front of everyone were a few ways of ill-treatment. The effects of this were jarring. Some teachers accepted the seclusion with resignation, families of some teachers had to face repercussions and some lost their peace of mind and focus in protesting, but the worst impact was felt in the classrooms. The manner of dealing with students changed. Teachers were not able to spend any extra time building a bond with the students or giving feedback. The way the teachers were given deadlines, they started doing the same with the students. Though they did not stoop to the level of

humiliating students, the teachers knew they were not doing things right and this made them feel even more miserable. The same responses could be seen by the students too. The time that they used to enjoy and talk among themselves was spent in completion of tasks without bothering about anyone who needed their help. This was leading to unhappiness.

The online era, which had a bright side to it, was also a time where humiliation knew no limits. Many teachers became victims of innocent tricks to vulgar jokes. I still feel the trauma that I went through on finding my meme on social media. I wanted to quit school. In fact, I wanted to quit teaching. But I was fortunate enough to get help from my institute that pulled me out of that pit of humiliation. A care call that I received from my authorities just to find out my wellbeing was a booster that added to the trust that I had in my institute. I started following the same for my students. These phone calls have a magical effect in building happy classrooms.

As educators, we know the importance of spoken as well as body language, then why don't we put this knowledge to use when we deal with teachers? Harsh words leave an impression that takes a toll on the physical as well as emotional well-being of teachers. Treating them with a humane touch may cost nothing but trust will reap great benefits. Just imagine if teachers can contribute so much, despite being offended, how much an institute and in turn a country can prosper if teachers are happy. Let's work towards making teachers happy in order to have happy schools.

The author is an educator and writer. She can be reached at <shabirahussain123@gmail.com>.

Bridge-building women

Mamata Pandya

Bridge collapses at multiple locations across the country during the recent months have brought the focus on bridges. This may be an appropriate time to understand these bridges a little better. To go back in time and know about the early bridges and those who built them.

To discover that one of the first patents for a chain-suspended bridge in England was filed in 1811 by a woman! This was Sarah Guppy, an engineer, inventor, campaigner, designer, reformer, writer, environmentalist, and business woman, in a period when

it was unthinkable that women could be anything except wives, homemakers, and mothers.



Sarah was born in 1770 to a wealthy merchant family of Birmingham. In 1795 Sarah married Samuel Guppy, a rich Bristol merchant, 15 years older to her, and settled into family life in Bristol. This was a period when the Industrial Revolution was shifting the largely agrarian economy of England towards mechanized manufacture.

As per the societal norms of the time, women were expected to keep house and raise children. While Sarah largely conformed to her role and went on to have six children, she was far from docile and dull. Sarah was exceptionally well-read, talented, and creative. She and her husband were part of the Bristol society and amongst their friends were Thomas Telford, a road and tunnel engineer, and the family of Isambard Kingdom Brunel. Brunel was one of the most versatile engineers of the 19th century, responsible for the design of tunnels, bridges, railway lines and ships. He is best remembered for his construction of a network of tunnels, bridges and viaducts for the Great Western Railway (GWR). Coming into contact with such people sparked Sarah's interest in the science and craft of engineering, and triggered in her creative mind the desire to invent engineering solutions.

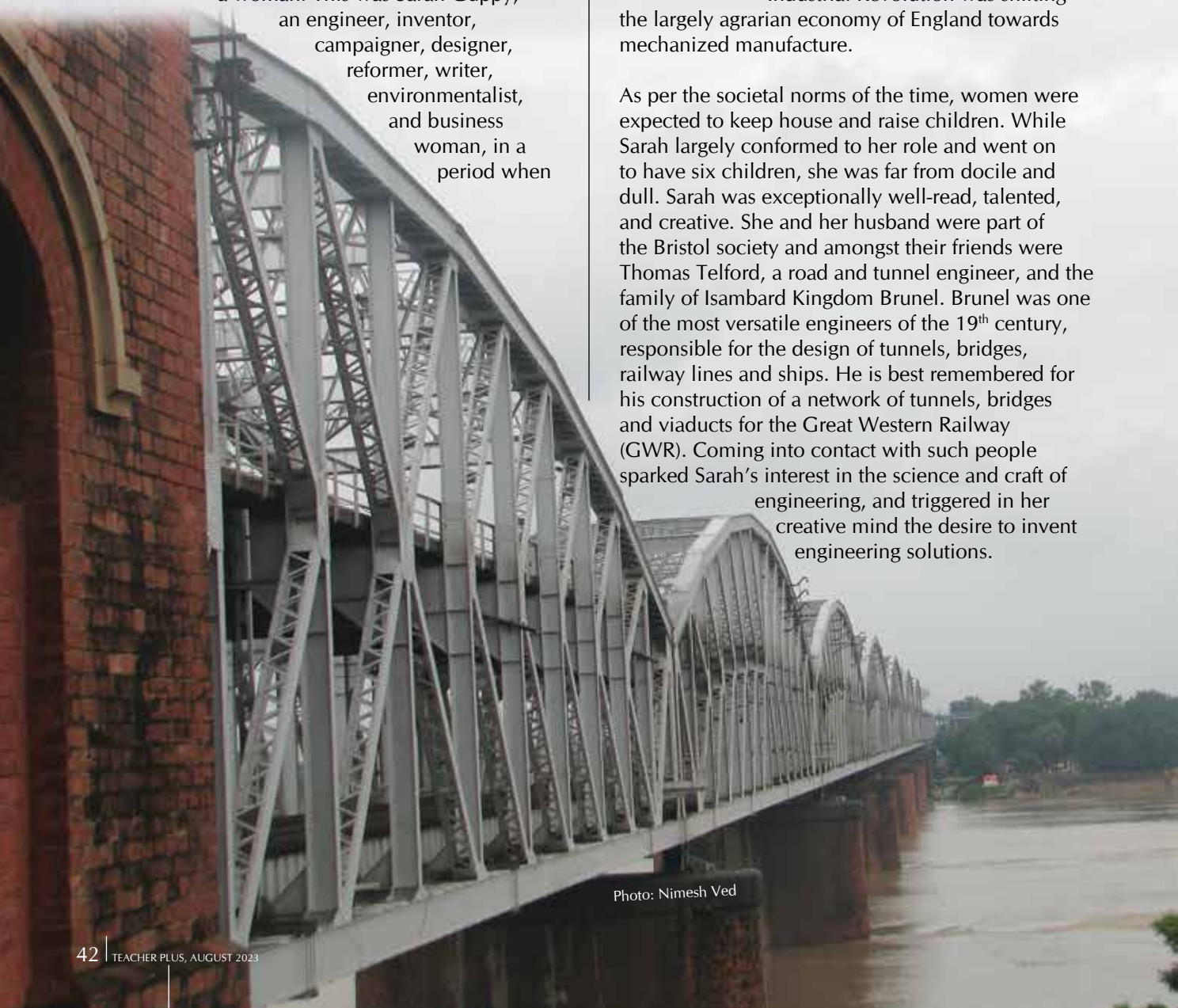


Photo: Nimesh Ved

Sarah was an early advocate of a suspension bridge in Clifton – a project that had long been debated and discussed. She was engaged in preparing models of the bridge that could span the river Avon. Her idea was to work on a way of piling foundations to create a new type of suspension bridge, and she made drawings and plans for the same. Her son Thomas was GWR's principal engineer, and she gave the design and plans for her bridge over the Avon to Brunel.

When her youngest daughter was just a year old, Sarah applied for a patent for a way of piling foundations to create a new type of suspension bridge. In March 1811, she obtained a patent for erecting and constructing bridges and rail-roads without arches or starlings, whereby the danger of being washed away by floods is avoided. What was noteworthy was that Sarah became the first woman ever to patent a bridge. Even more noteworthy was the fact that this was in a period when married women could not even own property in their name.

Sarah's inventive mind did not stop at this. She developed a device to prevent barnacles forming on boat hulls, and sold the contract to the British Navy. She also put forward a scheme to prevent soil erosion on railway embankments by planting willow and poplar trees. Even as she played her role as homemaker, she came up with innovations. She designed a bed that could also be used as a gymnasium with steps and bars for exercising; and a coffee urn whose steam could be used to boil an egg and at the same time keep the toast warm! She was even granted a patent for this in 1812. In all Sarah won 10 patents, a remarkable achievement in the late Georgian and early Victorian period.

Sarah was not just ahead of her times in her engineering prowess. She wrote and presented schemes for a wide range of issues including animal welfare, education, agriculture, and horticulture. She also wrote a book, 'Instructive and Entertaining Dialogues for Children' and founded a charity school for girls.



Bridging the span across continents, and across nearly a century, this is a good time to remember Shakuntala A. Bhagat – India's first woman civil engineer. Shakuntala was born on 6 February 1933. Her father S.B. Joshi is regarded as the Father of Bridge

Engineering in India. She was just 20 years old when she got her civil engineering degree from Virmata Jijabai Technological Institute and the first woman in India to get the degree. From 1954 to 1956 she went to West Germany and UK for practical training, and got her master's degree in civil engineering from the University of Pennsylvania. She returned to India to join IIT Mumbai as assistant professor in 1960 and went on to become Head of the Heavy Structures Laboratory there.

Shakuntala was more than an academic. She pioneered many innovative structural designs, especially for bridges. She and her husband, Anirudha S Bhagat, designed and patented an innovative prefabricated modular system known today as the Quadricon Modular Bridge System. This is a series of prefabricated mass-produced modular bridge steel parts, small and lightweight enough to make transport easier for builders. They can be used in different types of bridges, different spans, traffic widths, and loads, by changing the combination of the assemblies.

Shakuntala was awarded the Woman Engineer of the Year Award in 1993. She passed away in 2012, a century after the first patent for a bridge was awarded to Sarah Guppy. She left behind a lasting legacy of over 200 Quadricon bridges around the world (including 69 in India) in terrains that challenge engineers even today.

In October 2016 the Government of India announced the launch of the Indian Bridge Management System, the largest platform in the world to collect information on bridges. This database would certainly be enriched by adding information on the pioneers who designed and built bridges.

The author worked at the Centre for Environment Education in Ahmedabad for over three decades, where she was engaged in instructional design for educators and children. She is now an independent consultant, editor, writer, translator, storyteller and blogger. She can be reached at <mamata.pandya@gmail.com>.

An inward exploration

Timira

A bi-monthly column that focuses on the inner self of the teacher.

New column, new journey

The last two years I have been running a column here titled 'I for Inclusion' which talked about inclusivity in classrooms, schools, and in our everyday lives. However, the objective was not to share methods, tools and techniques from a special needs point of view but to see inclusion as a larger attitude by bringing in awareness and sensitivity in the everyday, and nurturing an attitude of inclusivity which everyone can build capacities for.

In the journey of writing about different approaches to build such capacities, I wrote more and more about exploring the nature of one's true self, especially through the arts. Exploring by indulging in play, by engaging the body, by being

conscientious listeners and observers, by igniting curiosity for learning, by giving ourselves new experiences, by immersing oneself in creative arts practices, and of course, by being reflective. I also wrote about how we can find several ways to move closer to our authentic selves and in the process evolve into more sensitive and inclusive individuals. The more we listen to our inner voice, the more clarity we gain in the way we view life around us, enabling us to identify the intentionality of what we do and how we do it.

I work extensively with teachers across the country on exploring and discovering their inner selves, using arts-based practices as the primary medium to approach this journey. Hence, it only made sense to shift towards writing about the exploration of the inner self of the teacher. This I strongly believe is a path which will bring back 'autonomy' to the teacher – a word I will address at length later in this article.

Here lies my intention for this column that I have titled 'The Teacher Within' with the hope to trigger a need to explore an inward journey. I hope this column serves you well as a teacher, a head of school, a parent or as an individual deeply invested in the process of learning. I hope to bring to you, thoughts and ideas from educators and philosophers both classical and contemporary (or should I say 'post-pandemic'!) along with a few

humble sharings of my own practice with teachers in the Indian context.

It would be unfair for me to write about the inner self of the teacher without quoting the wonderful educator, Parker J. Palmer, who in his book *The Courage to Teach* writes extensively about this topic. He says, "Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher." Let's examine this idea a little closer.

It is common knowledge that teaching consists of two major sources that teachers constantly work upon. The first is the subject we teach, which is expansive and complex, much like life, so our knowledge of it will always be limited. No matter how dedicated and sincere we are to reading and research, subject knowledge acquisition will always be that mirage in the desert that we keep chasing. The second, are the students we teach, who are complex and ever changing. To be able to see them clearly, wholly, and respond to them with objectivity requires teachers to hone the skills of a philosopher, psychologist, and monk altogether! However, if teaching consisted only of subjects and students, one could imagine that consistent training in various tools, techniques, philosophies along with subject upgradation would be enough to stay ahead and for teachers to feel on top of the game.

But a third source of teaching and one that is more often than not left unacknowledged is the fact that 'we teach who we are' – here is where the identity and integrity of the teacher comes into play.

Teaching comes from within the teacher, from their respective contexts, experiences, and their individual world view. When we acknowledge the teacher self and its role in this intense engagement between teacher, student, and the subject, it brings in complexity. Today, when education is increasingly becoming standardized, global, and moving away from the personal, teachers often find themselves feeling incapacitated. The need to learn or upgrade is often focused on developing new skills and techniques hoping it will better their teaching methodologies. It moves teachers away from exploring their authentic selves as they try to 'fit in' to the demands of this global education system.

'In fact, knowing my students and my subject depends heavily on self-knowledge. When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are. I will see them through a glass darkly, in the shadows of my unexamined life – and when I cannot see them

clearly I cannot teach them well. When I do not know myself, I cannot know my subject – not at the deepest levels of embodied, personal meaning. I will know it only abstractly, from a distance, a congeries of concepts as far removed from the world as I am from personal truth.' (*The Courage to Teach*, Parker J. Palmer.)

The teacher plays an important role in education because the core of education is the relationship between teacher and student. A special relationship where two worlds meet with respect, curiosity, and authenticity. Education needs to explore new ways of exploring good teaching. Exploring a teacher's intellectual and emotional capacities, acknowledging and celebrating their backgrounds and contexts, expanding their world views, are a few paths towards teachers understanding their selfhood and bringing it into their teaching practice. A teacher's ability to connect with their students and their subjects depends less on the methods they use but more on how much they trust their own self, their intuition, how honest and authentic they are in the classroom and how ready they are to be vulnerable in this learning engagement.

All of this points towards the idea that teachers must have a good, healthy relationship with themselves and the environment that surrounds them. They must take complete autonomy in the work they do and take ownership of their learning journey. Their authority in the classroom is essential. 'Authority' here may sound like an oppressive word, but in fact is quite the opposite. It comes from the word 'author' and as Parker J. Palmer beautifully puts it, "authority is granted to people who are perceived as authoring their own words, their own actions, their own lives, rather than playing a scripted role removed from their own hearts."

With this, I hope to ignite an interest in readers here to journey with me, through this column, on an exploration of the inner self; to be ready to answer difficult questions, have stirring conversations and be vulnerable. All with an intention to bring our authentic selves in the classroom and in our engagements with our students and with a clear objective to take the lead on authoring our own lives and our actions as educators.

The author is an arts-based therapist, educator and children's author. She is the former executive director of Akshara High School, Mumbai and has been working in the field of education for the past 15 years designing arts-based curriculum and training teachers. She can be reached at <TeachersAsArtistsCollective@gmail.com>.

Student – Teacher ratio: prescription vs reality

Anuradha C



Photo: Nimesh Ved

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankar meets his school teacher on his two-day visit to Kerala” – this was prime time news a month or two ago. It is admirable that a distinguished person holding a high office remembered his humble roots and chose to pay public salutations to his teacher. What I found even more admirable was that the teacher was able to vividly recall every small detail about Dhankar’s school days. “A young boy in khaki, sitting in the first row, fully concentrating on the class” – she fondly reminisced, among other things.

I have several teachers in my circle of acquaintances. For all practical purposes, I am one myself, though it is only a part-time vocation for me. When the above incident came up during casual conversations among us, each of us accepted that such a strong bond between teacher and student in today’s world is rare, very rare. Why is that, we wondered. Is it desirable, we debated. Yes, very much, we concluded.

A good many reasons for this diminished bonding cropped up during our discussions. But one reason

stood out as the root cause. It came up repeatedly as the underlying cause of many other issues. It was the issue of skewed student-teacher ratio. Keeping aside a handful of schools catering to the elite, most schools in our country, urban or rural, have a poor pupil-teacher ratio (PTR). That is the focus of this article.

PTR is a silent but fundamental problem ailing our education system. One that does not get the attention it warrants.

In my experience as a teacher of technology subjects, I have had the opportunity to teach classes with just 3-4 students present. At the other extreme, I have also had over 300 students sitting in my class! The dynamics of teaching small groups and large groups are entirely different. We label them differently too, and rightly so:

- **Private tutoring:** Mostly an informal gathering where the teacher takes special interest in the personal learning journey of every single student. **Ideal:** 1-10 students. **Typical:** As large as the tutor's living room!
- **Coaching classes:** Whether online or in person, these are organized training sessions conducted by private companies generally oriented towards an entrance examination. **Ideal:** Around 25 students. **Typical:** Close to ideal, at least that's what their ads say.
- **Formal schooling:** Formal classroom environment with fixed roster schedules and teachers working towards the primary goal of syllabus completion. **Ideal:** Around 30 students. **Typical:** Between 25-80 students.
- **Training and workshops:** Medium-size gathering of a Subject Matter Expert imparting on-job skills to participants. The goal is to collaborate in real projects and learn from the mentorship of the trainer. **Ideal:** Around 30 students. **Typical:** Focused and effective when conducted at the mentors' official premises. But overcrowded and largely ineffective when conducted at the education institutions.
- **Knowledge sharing sessions/lectures:** Meant to be a one-way dissemination of knowledge on specific topics from an expert to a deeply interested audience. **Ideal:** Attendee strength not a constraint as it's more of a one-way knowledge sharing.

Each of these forms has a specific scope and purpose and works well only in that scope.

What is recommended as per the law

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE) in its Schedule lays down the PTR for both primary and upper primary schools. At primary level the PTR should be 30:1 and at the upper primary level it should be 35:1. The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) framework stipulates that the PTR at secondary level should be 30:1.

Why higher student strength doesn't work?

To help convey a point, the teacher needs to constantly make eye contact with the students. The teacher monitors the body language of the students to gauge whether the students are able to understand what is being taught. Only then can the teacher narrow down on the students who need more attention including those who are inattentive. And, it is practically impossible for a teacher to monitor more than 25-30 students in an effective, focused way.

What about online classes?

Online classes are suboptimal compared to in-person classes as they are devoid of body language gesturing or making eye contact. They are rising in popularity as there are other reasons where they score better such as saving travel time, use of digital tools, and so on. However, monitoring absenteeism and indiscipline is the key challenge for online classes. So the same thumb rule holds. It is practically impossible for a teacher to monitor more than 25-30 students in an effective, focused way even in online classes.

Urban vs rural challenges

The problem seems uniformly prevalent in government schools, urban working-class neighborhoods, and rural schools. Good, knowledgeable teachers are lured away by other lucrative job options in urban centers. In the villages, local inspired teachers who can effectively convey subject matter content in the vernacular are limited. So, in both cases, the issue is scarcity of good teachers. That invariably leads to overcrowding of classes of the teachers who remain to shoulder the responsibilities.

The way forward

There are some concrete solutions articulated in the New Education Policy, 2020 (NEP). The NEP focuses heavily on filling vacancies for teachers and also pays attention to the often-neglected aspect – the PTR.

First, teacher vacancies will be filled at the earliest, in a time-bound manner – especially in disadvantaged areas and areas with large PTR or high rates of illiteracy, says the policy document.

“Special attention will be given to employing local teachers or those with familiarity with local languages. A PTR of under 30:1 will be ensured at the level of each school; areas having large numbers of socio-economically disadvantaged students will aim for a PTR of under 25:1,” lays down the policy.

“Teachers will be trained, encouraged, and supported – with continuous professional development – to impart foundational literacy and numeracy”, it says.

“On the curricular side, there will be an increased focus on foundational literacy and numeracy – and generally, on reading, writing, speaking, counting, arithmetic, and mathematical thinking – throughout the preparatory and middle school curriculum, with a robust system of continuous formative/adaptive assessment to track and thereby individualize and ensure each student’s learning. Specific hours daily – and regular events over the year – on activities involving these subjects will be dedicated to encourage and enthuse students. Teacher education and the early grade curriculum,” the policy document says.

Sounds like an effective plan, at least on paper. What actually translates into concrete results, only time will tell.

Nevertheless, taking a cue from Dhankar’s visit each of us can make a concerted attempt to visit our alma maters and seek out our teachers. We can express our gratitude, share our successes, and make them feel cherished. We could even offer to volunteer to teach.

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The author is an IT industry drop-out after several years of slogging and money-making. She is now working freelance as a corporate technical trainer and content writer. She is hoping to channelize her passion for writing into a satisfying experience for herself and a joyous experience for her readers. She can be reached at <anuradhac@gmail.com>.

Mobile

Parents nowadays are thankful to schools for keeping their children away from mobiles as long as they are in schools. This means additional work for the schools from forming new rules and repeatedly communicating them to the students to confiscating mobile phones from classrooms as and when they are found. However, COVID 19 had both the parents and the schools hand over smart phones to children. Hands that were used to flipping pages of textbooks and storybooks, writing in notebooks, coming in touch with other human beings and doing a lot more got restricted to the smart phones. There was an assumption that once the society recovered from the pandemic, traditional schools and classrooms would be back.

Post COVID, classrooms did return to their old self with continuation of the same pedagogical practices, evaluation, and dominance of real time contact-based learning. A lot did fall back in place as assumed. The children, however, did not. Post COVID they returned to school with major changes in behaviour and personalities. Changes that now made them misfits. Changes the schools and parents are trying to accept, comprehend, and deal with.

This “New Normal” has brought with it a plethora of new terms including Smombie, Phubbing, and Nomophobia. These describe the new behaviours.



phone in the classroom

Dr Pooja Birwatkar

Phubbing is ignoring people and paying attention only to the phone, while smombie means a smart phone zombie. Nomophobia is the discomfort experienced at not being in touch with the virtual world and the fear of being without access to a mobile phone.

This is alarming. We need to understand the children who have become nomophobic – understand what they experience during the school time when they are unable to use the smart phone. Many researches (Vagka, et al. 2023; Molina et al. 2022; Ozdemir et al. 2021) focussing on nomophobia have found that factors like self-esteem, personality, anxiety, stress, mental and physical health issues, academic performance are all getting affected due to nomophobia. Researches have also documented that phone addicts in situations of stress respond by means of dejection, shifting blame onto others, self-pity, feeling hopeless, resigning, or doing substitute gratification (Dziurzyńska et al. 2017).

India's population is expected to reach 142.86 crore as per UNFPA's State of World Population Report, 2023 with 25% of India's population in the age group of 0-14 years, 18% in the 10-19 age group and 26% in the age bracket of 10-24 years. India now stares at a future where it may have the maximum number of mobile connections in the world. Children during corona phase accustomed

to learning via gadgets and smart phone in the hand were torn between the enticements offered by the phone versus being attentive in the classroom.

This addiction post corona is an issue. Now that smart phones are a part of our lives including school lives, we need to plan for them.

There have not been much documented researches by teachers regarding how nomophobia is affecting

their classroom. The paucity of such valuable research insights affects the crucial strategies that education systems need to devise. All the same, in this 'new normal' schools need to remodel and redesign themselves to combat nomophobia and other ills brought about by smart phones. They may need to:

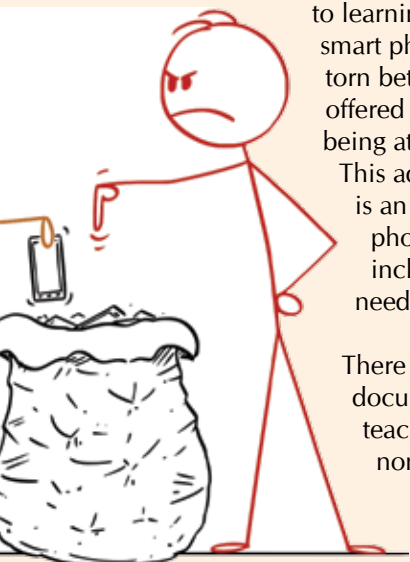
- Weave digital wellness into the curriculum.
- Conduct programs on mental health.
- Promote initiatives that warrant more social interactions especially group activities in the non-virtual world.
- Have acceptable systems and guidelines for extent of mobile phone usage.

Education systems already crumbling under the burden of expectations and resource constraints may look upon these actions as an additional burden. However, nomophobia is a serious concern both in terms of prevalence and magnitude and warrants concrete steps. Neither parents nor schools seem to have the option of not responding to this crisis with alacrity.

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The author is an educator and researcher at Somaiya Vidyavihar University, Mumbai, specializing in the field of teacher education. She is passionate about research and ardently pursues it. Her areas of interest are constructivism, dialogic teaching, socio-scientific issues, diversity and inclusion in education and science pedagogy. She can be reached at <pooja.birwatkar@somaiya.edu>.



It's magic

Anil Kumar Patnaik

As promised, Abhas sir entered the classroom. He asked one of the children to give him their English literature book.

"English literature book?" the children asked.

"You wanted to see magic, right?"

"Yesss...", the reply came in chorus. Abhas sir then took out few papers from his pocket, turned the pages of the literature book, scribbled something on the papers and put them back in his pocket.

"Okay, open your books," Abhas sir instructed.

"Write any three digit number abc, such that a-c is greater than or equal to 2, for example you can write 765, where $7-5=2$ or 974 where $9-4=5$," he added.

Children then looked at him for his next instruction.

"Now write the digits of the number in ascending and descending order, for example if you have chosen 849, you will write 984 and 489". This was clear to the children.

"Now subtract the smaller number from the bigger number and keep the result."

The children were getting excited.

"Now, reverse the number and add it to the result. For example, if your result is 468, its reverse is 864. Add both these numbers and keep the result. Please do not show it to anyone."

The children were listening to his instructions with rapt attention.

"I am sure the result of your exercise is a four-digit number," Abhas sir told everyone.

"Yes sir..." the children responded.

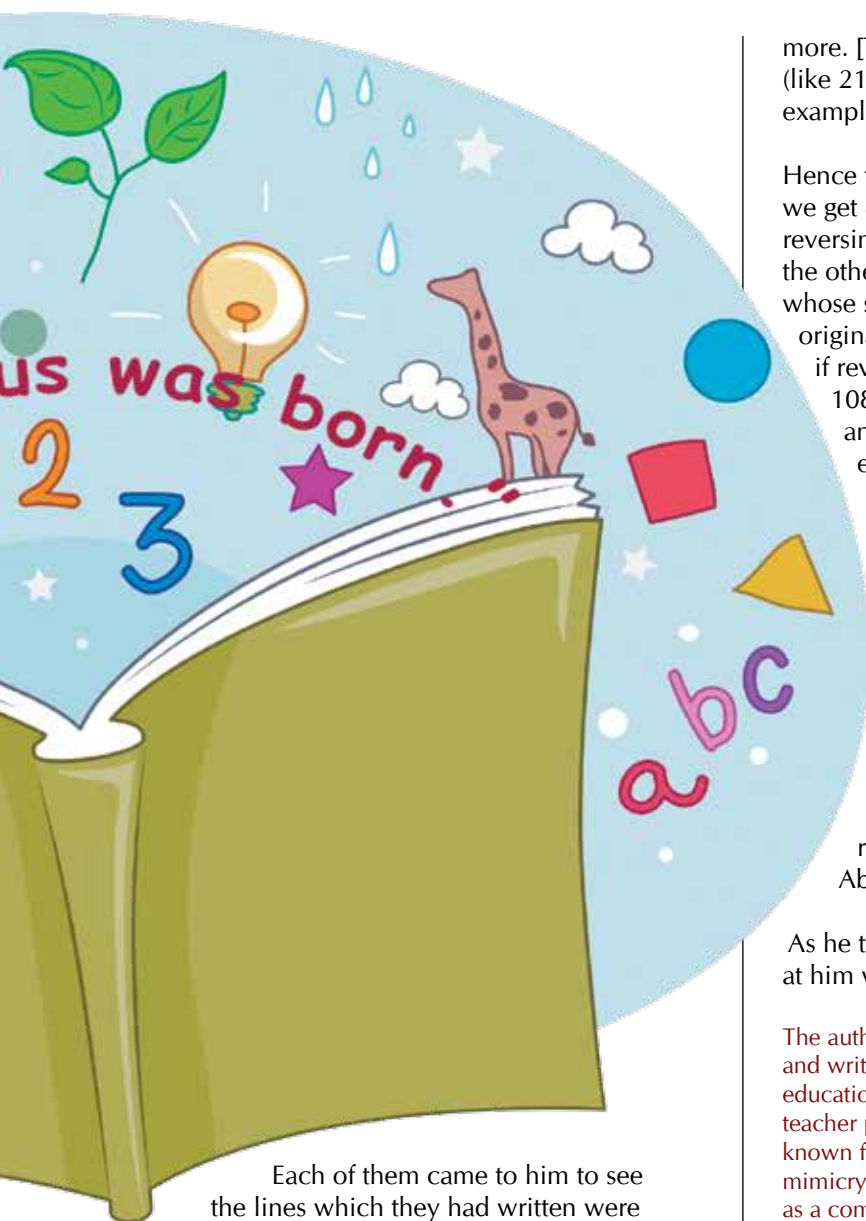
"Take out your English literature books, open the page number that is same as the first three digits of the number you have come up with. Then, proceed to the line equal to the fourth digit, for example if your answer is 2167, open page number 216 and go to the seventh line. Please note down the line in your notebook."

Abhas sir's explanations were very clear and lucid.

A few children continued with their task, while those who were done with their answers awaited the next set of instructions.

"Okay, those who have finished can come in a line," Abhas sir said with a smile. And as the first child came with his copy, Abhas sir took out one of the papers he had scribbled on earlier from his pocket and handed it to the child. "Oh my God!" cried the child when he found that Abhas sir had written the same line at the beginning of the period that he had written after the mathematical calculations. Absolute bewilderment was conspicuous on his face. Came the second child, "My goodness," he was perplexed yet happy.





Each of them came to him to see the lines which they had written were the same as those by Abhas sir. The children were so amused and stunned that they did not notice either the bell ringing or Abhas sir leaving the class.

Just then Mr. Sharma, the school principal invited Abhas sir to his room. Abhas sir entered the principal's chamber and was offered a seat. "I was on my rounds and observed your class. Quite interesting. Please explain how you performed the trick." Mr. Sharma asked Abhas sir. "Sir, since a, b, and c are the three digits of the original number, the number is $100a + 10b + c$, on reversing, the number is cba , that is $100c + 10b + a$. When subtracted $(100a + 10b + c) - (100c + 10b + a)$ is $99a - 99c$, that is $99(a - c)$. In the beginning itself I had made it clear that, in the three-digit number abc , $(a - c)$ must be 2 or

more. [The reason is to avoid palindromic numbers (like 212, 333, 919 etc) and two digit numbers (for example 201, if reversed it is 102. $201 - 102 = 99$.)]

Hence the number became $99 \times 2 = 198$, on reversing, we get 891. $198 + 891 = 1089$, $99 \times 3 = 297$. on reversing it's 792. $297 + 792 = 1089$ and similarly the other numbers 396, 495, 594, 693, 792, 891, whose sum, on reversing and adding with the original number, results 1089. Any of the numbers if reversed and added to itself will be equal to 1089, that is $198 + 891 = 1089$, $297 + 792 = 1089$ and so on. This is simple mathematics sir," explained Abhas. "That's fine but how did the lines you had written match with the lines by children?" Mr Sharma continued. Abhas sir took out the papers which were still in his pocket and showed them to Mr. Sharma, "and a genius was born." was written in each of the papers.

"I have written the same thing in each paper; it is the ninth line on page 108 in their English literature book and each of the children was getting 1089 as their answer. I ruffled the pages just to beguile them," replied Abhas sir and stood up.

As he took permission to leave, Mr. Sharma looked at him with appreciation.

The author is an enthusiastic educator of mathematics and writes on topics related to innovative and engaging educational methods. He is a CBSE resource person for teacher professional development programmes. He is known for his creative skills, story writing, dramatic and mimicry abilities, disciplined lifestyle, and contributions as a community worker. He can be reached at [<anilpatnaik8@gmail.com>](mailto:anilpatnaik8@gmail.com).

Generative AI – the mind in the machine

Neerja Singh

Generative AI is transforming mankind's creativity. It is shifting the drudgery from human shoulders so that they are free to focus on visions and ideas and purposes. The future of work is poised for a paradigm shift. How do schools create a place for their students in this age of breathtaking technological leaps?

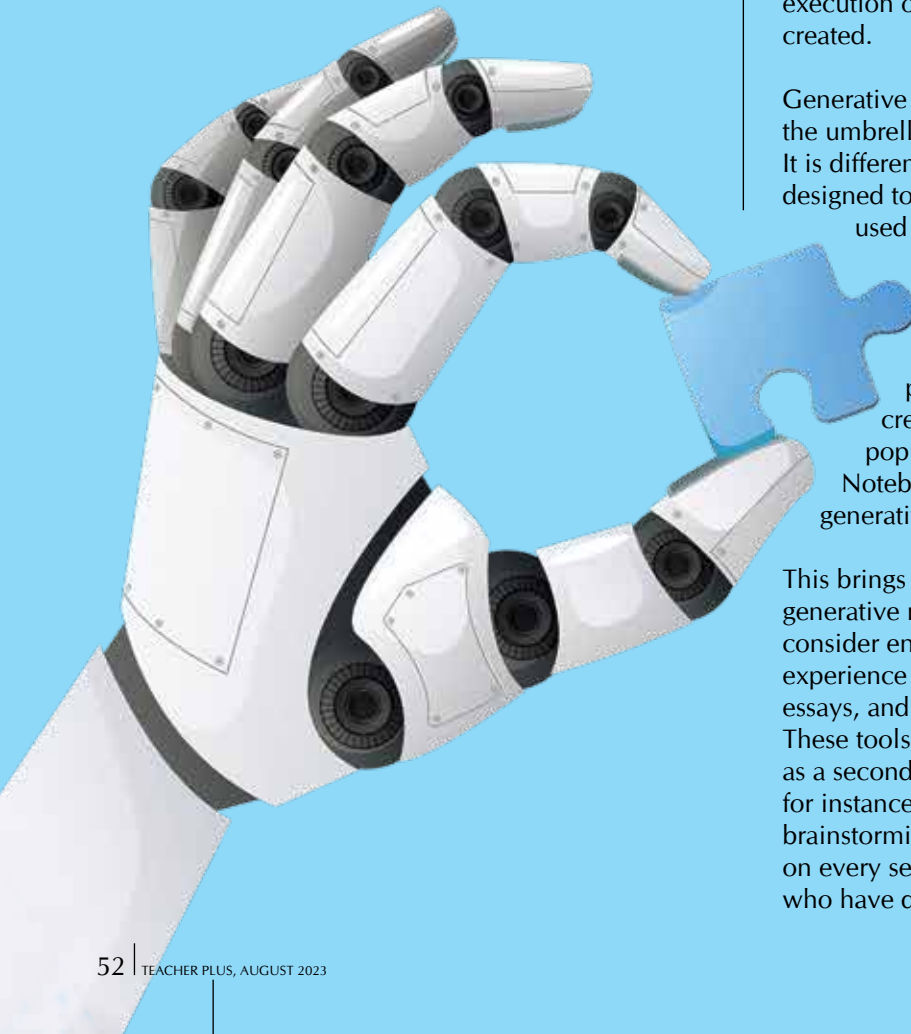
The coming of generative AI is being spoken of in the same breath that photography and celluloid film were, during their initial days. Just as the camera replaced artistic interpretations of reality, generative AI will make natural talent redundant. It is possible with generative AI to write, create products, and sing using algorithms that work from existing data. It is

like magic! Imagine machines that are tireless, work 24/7 and leave us free to direct them towards the more superior tasks of strategy and creativity.

How did generative AI come about? Decades were invested in mathematical work and research before ChatGPT by Open ai brought AI into public consciousness in 2022. ChatGPT or Chat Generative Pre-training Transformer and other generative AI models are transforming not just each one of the currently recognized professions, but they are changing our assumptions of what constitutes work. With repetitive work being facilitated by AI models, what is left for humans to do is to dream, be curious, strive for emotional intelligence and supervise the execution of our visions through the machines we created.

Generative AI is a sub-category that comes under the umbrella term of AI or artificial intelligence. It is different from the rest in that it is specifically designed to generate new content. It is primarily used for image generation, video synthesis, language creation, and music composition. There is a new term for a person who uses AI to create: Creative Technologist! And there is a range of paid services and tools to help with the creative process. At this time, some of the popular programs are Midjourney, Lensa, AI Notebooks. But it is important to remember that generative AI is changing every day.

This brings us to the question – What can AI generative models offer to schools? To start with, consider enhanced creativity and better learning experience for the students. New ideas, art works, essays, and fresh perspectives on all the subjects. These tools can benefit students who speak English as a second language. Take writing an essay for instance. AI tools can help the student from brainstorming ideas to editing drafts to reflecting on every sentence. They can also assist students who have different and complex learning styles. AI



generative tools can assist students with special needs or learning disabilities. There is the increasing demand for customized learning material and personalized guidance. AI-powered chatbots or computer programs that mimic human conversation are already simulating conversations in different languages, enabling translations and diverse exposures. Creating educational content, proofreading, upskilling, data-based decision making and more effective strategizing are some of the potential tasks that AI generative models can take up for schools.

Although there is no fixed age, the introduction of AI generative tools to students will depend on their age, development level, and educational objectives. Understanding and engaging with these tools requires an appropriate cognitive level in addition to a basic level of digital literacy. Schools will also need to ensure that the tools they introduce align with their curriculum goals and learning objectives. CBSE has taken the lead and introduced AI in the curriculum as an elective subject for classes 8th to 10th. It has also issued guidelines on AI integration. AI generative tools apply more to creative writing classes, art and computer science courses. And, like every other subject, the introduction will be staggered, moving from the simple to more advanced AI generative tools. The two other important aspects involved here would be collaboration between educators, administrators, and other relevant stakeholders as well as awareness of the ethical considerations concerning data privacy, bias, and responsible use. AI generative tools cannot replace human instruction since it will be left to the teachers to guide the students' learning and provide context.

Generative AI can also relieve educators of the time-consuming and tedious task of grading and assessment. By automating the process, it would be possible to give accurate real-time feedback in an objective and consistent manner. Given that AI algorithms are capable of identifying common errors and misconceptions among students, they could learn from their mistakes with the help of targeted feedback. The usual dependence on tests and quizzes could become more holistic, involving a range of outputs such as essays, projects, and presentations.



At this time in mankind's history, there is a lot of fear induced hype that machines will take over completely. Perhaps it would be prudent to take a step back and see that we may be entering a golden age of creativity and production. There will be a shift in the job market undoubtedly. It has always been that way. With every new technology, some jobs disappear while others are born. AI generated tools may give us more time to focus on superior skills such as empathy, leadership, and problem solving. What if this is the time for developers, generative AI artists, and creative producers? Each of us today could turn into our own creative studio with the potential to achieve our vision and manifestation.

We can make a choice to overcome all fear, judgement, and prejudice around AI. The bare fact is that AI is merely a tool in our service that we created. The tools do not pose a challenge, the real danger is of human laziness. If humans start relying on the machines to produce assets without striving for creativity, the outcomes will be mediocre.

So, let's keep the sparkle of human flair alive and not miss a single beat. We live and breathe on cutting edge obsolescence today! Humanity is poised to transcend from a society of consumers to creators. The winners will be those that strengthen their unique personal emotional skills that no computer can ever mimic. It is time to start investing in expanding personal consciousness, awareness, and emotional skills.

We are the power behind AI.

The author is a global speaker on generational diversity. Author of four generational books, her TEDx talk is titled "The Unaffordable Cost of Generation Gap". A certified virtual presenter, she represents the Professional Speakers Association of India on the Global Speakers Federation Board. She has a LinkedIn certification in "What is Generative AI" and can be reached at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/neerja-singh/>.

Nurturing readers through reading aloud

Pooja Sagar

During my initial days as a librarian at an alternative school at Bangalore, I observed that children weren't excited either about reading or seeking out the library to indulge in the joy of reading. They also seemed to lack a connection with the library as a space with books.

I realized that to nurture reading skills in children and facilitate their bonding with books I would need to augment my skills and of course, bring in innovation at the library. Around this time I was introduced to the Library Educator's Course (LEC) offered by Bookworm, Goa. I joined the course eager to learn to set up a vibrant, congenial and inclusive library space. LEC opened up a whole new world for me in the field of library education.

Questions

As part of LEC, I undertook a Field Project (FP) where I sought answers to a few questions. Questions that I faced:

- How do I get the children to connect with books?
- How do I help children connect what they are reading to their own life experiences and to see themselves in stories they read (text-to-self connections); as also to appreciate the myriad

lifestyles and life experiences around them (text-to-world connections)?

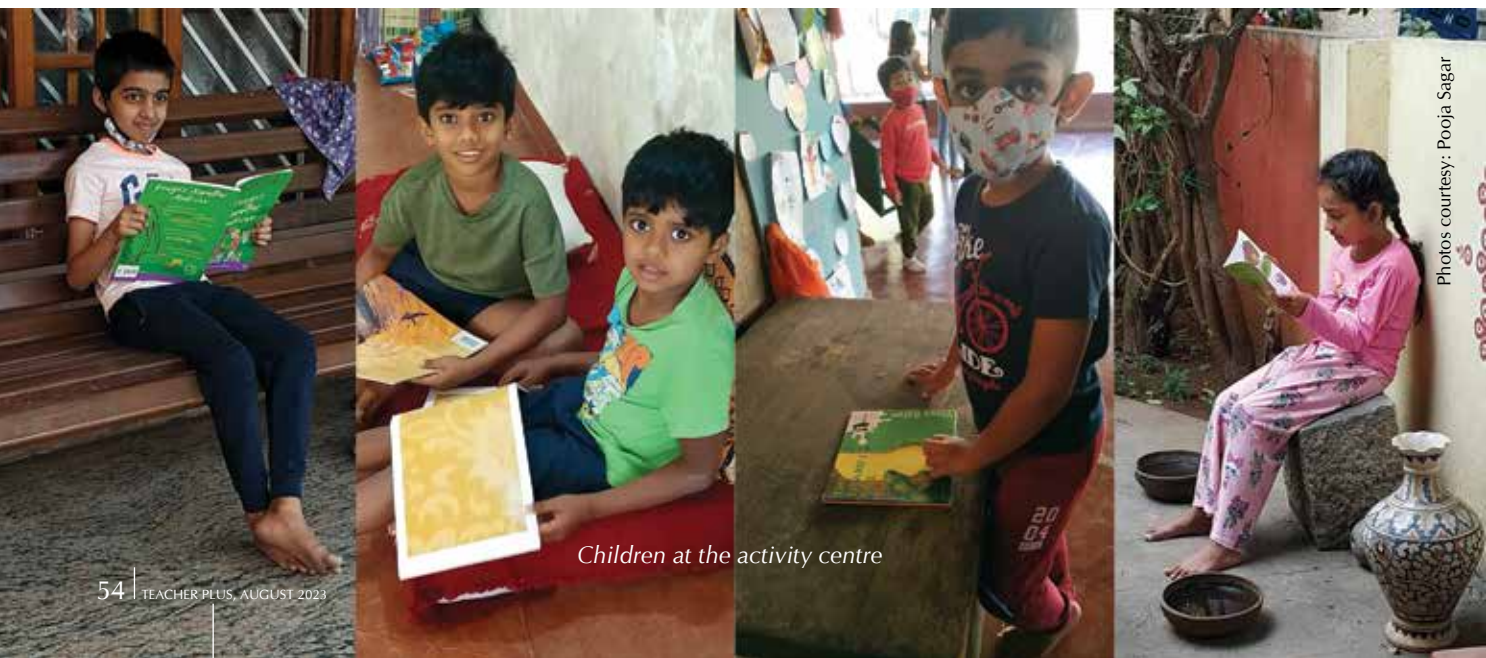
- Which of the library practices do I experiment with, in course of the FP such that I get to strengthen my bond with children and in turn help them connect with books and the library?

Space and group

The school was shut on account of COVID and so I chose to conduct the FP in a garage space close to my residence. Eight children from the school, aged between eight and to ten years, signed up for the project. None of these children were either avid readers or hugely passionate about books.

Plan

I decided to introduce books that were relevant to the children's lives and check if this activity sparked interest in the story; help them make connections with their life experiences and therefore, make them look forward to reading more such books. I imagined that these books would act as mirrors where children would see themselves in stories, thus enabling text-to-self connection. I chose stories of events I assumed were the everyday lives of children in urban spaces. Some titles were *Just like papa* by Nandita da Cunha



Photos courtesy: Pooja Sagar

Children at the activity centre

(Tota books, 2020), *The invisible boy* by Trudy Ludwig (Random House Children's books, 2013) and *Koala Lou* by Mem Fox (Voyager books, 1991).

I wanted to explore whether having conversations around a book would present a sense of inclusivity and acceptance of one another's opinions; of another person's life and experiences and to the events happening in the community or the world around them. Such books would thereby act as windows and give children glimpses of the world around them. I chose stories that would introduce children to worlds they may not directly experience such as *Sabri's colours* by Rinchin (Tulika Books, 2012), *The why-why girl* by Mahasweta Devi (Tulika Books, 2012) and *Kali and The Rat Snake* by Zai Whitaker (Tulika Books, 2006).

I also wanted to observe if the 'read-aloud' practice, of which I learnt during the LEC, would help answer my questions.

Reflections and learning

Flexibility

Making plans for each of the sessions helped me facilitate the sessions in a structured fashion. Taking notes post the session enabled me to plan the future sessions better. Yet, by the third week into my FP, I was feeling stressed. My lesson plans were tightly packed and I felt the pressure of accomplishing the tasks planned. This meant that, I could not go with the flow and allow for lively banter among children, which I also desired. I always felt pressurised to accomplish all the tasks that I had planned.

I then reflected on the need for some buffer time to allow for free-flowing activities and spontaneous conversations during the sessions. I learnt that it is good to have an agenda, but being flexible is the key. It is essential to be responsive and intuitive while working with children and accommodate changes based on the needs of the children.

I noticed that children may have shorter attention spans and hence lengthy activities led to distractions. So, I reduced lengthy activities into short periods of smaller varied activities. I learnt that children respond and participate better when there are different activities of shorter durations.

Interactions and activities

Along with the read-aloud sessions, I planned some interactive sessions and activities. These made the learning-process more collaborative!



Ridhi book talk

Book talks – Allotting a dedicated time to have conversations about books had powerful effects. When children shared what they had been reading, their friends got interested and picked those books. They also started making book recommendations to each other.

Right from day one, Ridhi had been completely involved with *The Story of Slavery* by Sarah Courtauld (Usborne young reading, 2010). She discussed the unfairness of slavery multiple times and also told about the characters and incidents in the book with other children. After her book talk, the book was in high demand among the children. I learnt that book talks not only helped children talk about their personal connections with the book, but also generated curiosity among the listeners. The curiosity led to more children borrowing the book under discussion.

Character alive – One of my colleagues dressed like a lion and a lizard for the 'character alive' acts. Children picked up the story books immediately after they saw his acts. I learnt that activities such as 'character alive' are powerful to ignite curiosity for reading! I also reflected that the participation and collaboration with other adults at school builds a community that nurtures reading.

Prompts – During read-aloud sessions, I noticed that children weren't sharing their feelings or thoughts

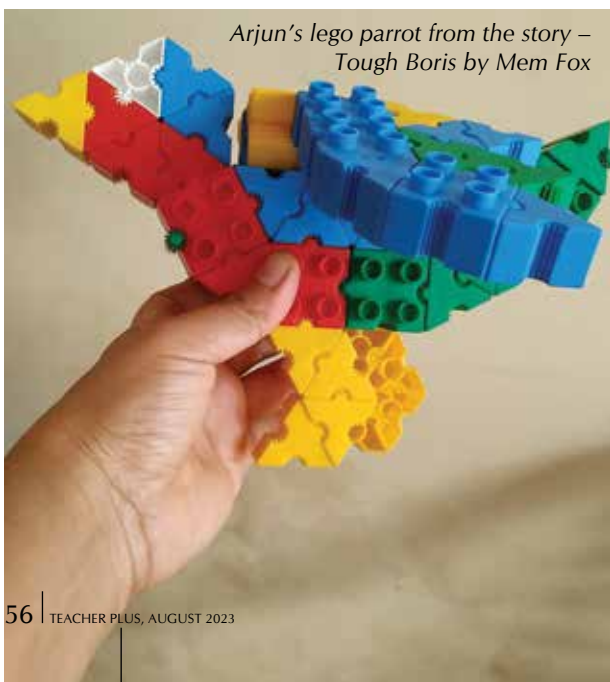


Ravi as lion

while I read. In order to get them to share eagerly, I started using question prompts such as – ‘What is happening in this picture?’ ‘How do you think he/she is feeling?’ ‘Has it happened to you too?’ ‘Have you ever felt like this?’ etc.

As the weeks passed I noticed that a few children started sharing their personal experiences even before I prompted; while a few shared upon prompting. I learnt that prompting aids in nurturing personal connections with books. Children also took turns to read-aloud, which made me reflect that children are enjoying the process of reading out loud.

Library games – Along with read – aloud sessions, I chose activities such as treasure hunt, quiet reading time, snowman and pictionary. These games helped



Arjun's lego parrot from the story –
Tough Boris by Mem Fox

children develop a sense of camaraderie with me and helped break the monotony of just reading-out loud every session.

As days passed, children started displaying deeper bonds of friendship with me. They made personalized cards and built Lego models for me. They hugged me more often too.

I reflected that the librarian is the heart of the library and that a librarian's positivity and drive to lead a robust library program, aids children to connect deeply with books and library.

Issue of books & library cards

Library activities and interactions in turn accelerated the issue of books. I noticed that children were borrowing almost all the books that were represented in activities or spoken about in book talks.

When I browsed their library cards, I noticed that Pushpa was borrowing five to six books each week, as compared to Sumith who would borrow one or two books. I realized that the former didn't have access to books anywhere else; while the latter had access to personal book collections at home.

I reflected that not all readers can be compared to each other and one has to think of each reader as an individual in the library. These reflections guided me to start a small community library.

People

People play a vital role in the library space. Guidance and support of mentors from Bookworm, Goa throughout the FP, was hugely beneficial. Our school principal supported my project by organizing

Taken	Return	
3/2/2022	10/2/2022	1) Can't you sleep my little bear? ✓ 2) The Witch's Vacation ✓ 3) Loose teeth ✓ 4) Burying my Honey ✓ 5) 5 Tinkles ✓
10/2/2022	16/2/2022	1) 10 Tinkle ✓ 2) If you give a mouse a cookie ✓ 3) The inch prince ✓ 4) A to Z Mysteries ✓ 5) The Missing Honey ✓

Pushpa's library card entry

Book Taken	Book Return	Book name	My Thoughts
20-1-2022	10-2-22	The magic Finger	★
27-1-2022	10-2-22	The orange out law	★★★★★
10-2-22		A to Z Mysteries super editions	
4-2-22	25-2-22	Pinochio!	★★★★
4-3-22		Kali Rat snake	

Sumith's library card entry

school transport to pick and drop the children to my activity centre. The parents supported my cause by sending children despite risk of COVID spread. I learnt that a library engagement requires immense cooperation and support from members of the extended community.

Inclusion

During the FP period, two children from the neighbourhood, walked in. Encouraged by the excitement they saw and heard, they were keen to join the rest of the children. We gladly welcomed the newcomers. The older children introduced them to the book collection and the library cards. Slowly, the new children got fully involved in the activities. Two more girls from our school also joined as volunteers. By the end of the FP, there were twelve children in all! This taught me that an inclusive library can be an attractive place for young minds!

Conclusions

The practice of 'reading aloud' helped me bond with children over books. Along with reading aloud, the acts of questioning, drawing attention to illustrations and prompting helped children make personal connections with books. Children volunteered to read-aloud too, which was a positive stroke in my discovery to nurture readers.

The children too have started bonding with me, the books, and the library. They talk about books when they see me at school even now, long after the project. They continue to share stories about matters we discussed during the project. They keep checking if the library has ordered new books. Children are keen to do book-talks and make book-recommendations, which are indicators that they are turning into happy readers.

Constant reflections are very vital for a librarian in order to have a deeper and richer engagement with a library practice. Being flexible and attentive to the constantly changing needs of children is essential in order to keep the program, vibrant and dynamic. A strong library vision coupled with the librarian's work commitments are the essential driving forces for a successful library program. I look forward to all these in the years to come.

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The author is works as a librarian and also teaches Environmental Management in Ohana school, Bangalore. She's a professional storyteller and also runs a children's library out of her home. She loves watching birds and is a lover of elephants. She can be contacted at <poojasagar.2000@gmail.com>.

Reading room

Chatura Rao

Drowsy eyes on backlit text,
one coughs, one drums a leg,
one smiles into a coffee cup;
I wait for them to settle down
and read the story I love.

Scale the steeps of Ariel 10,
descend a valley of deeds,
where men and clones must mine the gut
of a whimsical beast:
planet Libra, under siege, implodes,
buries nine but misses three,
in the story I love.

The two survivors, sorrowing,
console the shattered clone
until he speaks in a faltering tone
of a wish to be akin, be whole -

I glance around the chilly room
grey in the December light.
Stilled in their seats, faces rapt
journeying across space-time...
Young readers, tentative and sage,
make kinship with this dusty page
where mirrors sewn in metre and phrase
light our darkening way,
in the story we love.

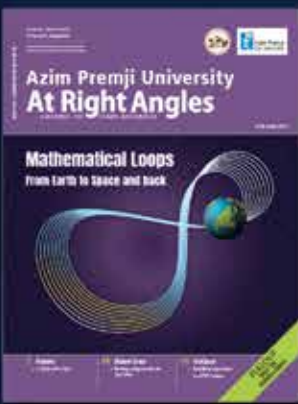
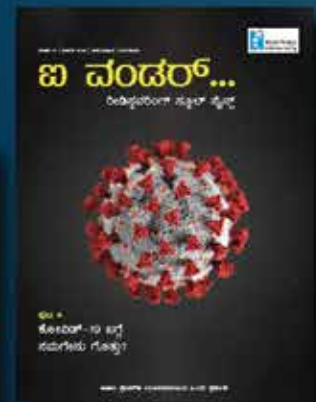
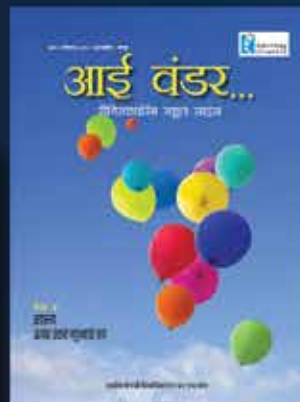
*Inspired from a class on Humans and Data for
Bachelor of Design students. We read and discussed
Ursula K le Guin's science fiction story 'Nine Lives'
(1969) that day.*

The author is a children's and adult fiction author, a journalist, and a teacher. Her writing centres around community practises, gender, and education. Her reportage has won Laadli Awards for gender sensitive reporting. Her recent picture book, *The Sweet Shop Wars*, is shortlisted for a 2023 Neev Book Award. She can be reached at <chaturarao@gmail.com>.

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